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# HELD IN BONDAGE

GRANVILLE DE VIGNE.

A Tale of the Day.

BY "OUIDA."

"A young man married is a man that's married."

SHAKESPEARE

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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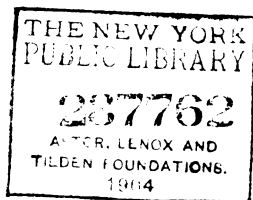
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# GRANVILLE DE VIGNE.

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## PART THE SIXTEENTH.

### I.

“LES ORAGES SONT ENVIRONNÉS DE BEAUX JOURS.”

THE ball at Lady Molyneux's was on the 25th of June. On the day after, just a fortnight before the 10th, which was fixed as his marriage-day, Sabretasche gave a fête at his Dilcoosha. That exquisite place, which had always reminded me of Vathek and of Fonthill, was ten thousand times more exquisite now. Little as I notice detail where I admire the tout ensemble, and intolerable as I consider the fashion of lingering over the modern upholstery in a novel, and interspersing the description of Adeliza's or Fitzallan's harrowing sufferings with that of her Sèvres and silver cafetière, or his velvet and gold smoking-cap, I must admit that the Dilcoosha was perfect, and I do not think Aladdin himself could have improvised a more lovely cage for his pet bird than the Colonel had done for his. It had been a whim of his to embellish that house in every possible way before his engagement; but after it, he seemed to take a perfect delight in making Violet's home as luxurious and as beautiful as his wealth, and his art, and his own love of everything graceful and refined could com-

bine to render it. I went over it with him one day, and I told him that if ever I wanted to do up old Longholme as lavishly, I hoped he would come and act as superintendent of the works. Certainly, if Violet had married the highest peer in the realm, she could not have had a more lovely shrine than the Dilcoosha. Regalia's grim and grand old castle in Merionetshire would have looked very dull and dark after Sabretasche's villa, where everything was perfect. The grounds were as wild and luxuriant as any woodland in the heart of the provinces, while yet all the resources of horticulture were lavished on them, and their cascades and fountains rivaled Chatsworth. The conservatories excelled even Leila Puffdoff's winter-garden, with here and there among their glories of blossom and coloring a marble group or a single statuette, such as the rifling of Parisian, and Florentine, and Roman studios could give him. The suite of drawing-rooms opened out of them, a soft demi-lumière streaming through rose-hued glass on the thousand gems of art, the low couches, the buhl cabinets, mosaic tables, delicate books, statuettes, flowers, Dresden figures, that were gathered in them; the walls were hung with white watered silk, looped up here and there to show little oval landscapes by some of the first French masters, and parted at regular distances for mirrors, that reflected the exotics that clustered at their feet. Violet's morning room, (I hate the word "boudoir;" stock-brokers' Hackney or Peckham villas boast their "boudoirs," and tradesmen's wives sit puffing under finery in "boudoirs," while their lords take invoices in white aprons, or advertise their "Nonpareil trousers," their genuine Glenlivat, or *ne plus ultra* coats!)—Violet's morning room was hung in pale green and gold, with a choice library of her favorite works collected in quaint medieval book-stands, the deep bay-window opening on to the

loveliest view the grounds afforded, the walls painted in illustration of Lallah Rookh, and the greatest gems the house contained in sculpture or in art shrined here in her honor—a room in which, looking out to the fair landscape beyond, and back to the rich treasures of art within, one fondly felt

To sit in sunshine calm and sweet,  
It were a world too exquisite  
For man to leave it for the gloom,  
The cold dark shadow of the tomb!

Her bed-room and her dressing-room rivaled Lady Blessington's, and Sabretasche needed all his great wealth to adorn them as he did. The bed was of carved ivory, the curtains of pink silk and white lace, caught up by a chain of flowers, moulded and chased in silver; all the hangings of the rooms were pink and silver, while silver lamps swung from the ceiling, giving out perfume as they burned. It was a home fit for an imperial bride, and though a still fairer shrine, and for a purer deity, made me think of Du Barry's Luciennes, where the "very locks of the doors were works of art and chefs-d'œuvre of taste." Sabretasche had such pleasure in beautifying it, for his habitual love of art and refinement was in it, blent with his tender love for Violet Molyneux, and, if ever a man's or woman's idol was worthy of the shrine made for them, she merited his lavish gifts.

On the 26th, Sabretasche had a fête at the Dilcoosha, a day to be spent, according to Violet's programme, so that, as she said, "she might catch a glimpse of the Summer, and forget the Season for an hour or two;" and as the Colonel's Dilcoosha was known to afford, if anything could, the requisites for enjoying a long day, no one, even the most ennuyé, was bored at the prospect, especially as his invitations were invariably very exclusive, and I

know people who would rush into that quarter where is written—

*Lasciate ogne speranza, o voi ch'entrate,*

if the admissions were exclusive, and would decline Paradise if its golden gates were opened to the multitude.

We drove down to luncheon there at three, strolled in the grounds afterward, listened to the band of the Dashers in the open air, to some of the opera artistes in the music-room, boated on the river, or flirted and ate ice under the perfumy limes, according to custom in such affairs; dined at eight, and about eleven found our way to a large marquee opening out of the conservatories, decorated in such style as Sabretasche was certain to have anything under his management done, where our band played waltzes and galops till the first rays of morning broke over the summer sky.

There were Lady Ela with her stately beauty, and Mrs. Tite Delafield with her divine figure, and Madame de la Vieillecour with her courtly coquetries, (so stateful yet so skillful, that I have lived to thank God my fair-faced Gwen was faithless to her pledge, and that M. l'Ambassadeur has trusted his name to her—not I;) and there were De Vigne, and Curly, and Castleton, and countless others; in a word, all who had met the previous evening at the Molyneux' soirée, (except, to be sure, the Little Tressillian, who was only half a mile away, but in ignorance of the brilliant gathering at the Dilcoosha;) and there was, of course, Sabretasche's fiancée, so soon to be his bride, his wife—with the light of love in her brilliant violet eyes, and the glories of her coming future in the shadowless beauty of her face, which, fair as they were, no woman there could rival.

The luncheon was gay and brilliant; repartee flowed with the still *Al*, and mots sparkled with the *Johannisberg*.

Sabretasche showed nowhere to better advantage than as a host; his Chesterfieldian courtesy, his graceful urbanity, his careful attention to everybody, and every trifle, above all, his art in starting conversation and drawing people out, always made parties at his house more charming than at any other; and, delightful as he had ever been in society, even when the curse of his bitter secret and his early shame was on him, you can fancy how delightful a host the Colonel was now that his fate was cloudless and Violet Molyneux his guest.

During the luncheon, De Vigne sat next to Leila Puffdoff, who, as I have before hinted, was willing to make more love to him than Granville cared to make to her. De Vigne was much set upon by fine ladies, partly for the chivalric aroma that hung about him from his campaign in Scinde, partly for the distinguished beauty of his face and form, and chiefly because he was so haughtily indifferent to them, and the romantic circumstances of his early marriage rendered him a sort of fruit défendu. The little Countess had really fallen in love with him, such love as young coquettes like her take—as they take their sal volatile or eau de cologne—as a little pleasant excitement; she flirted with him desperately during the luncheon, and made him row her on the river afterward, part of the grounds of the Dilcoosha sloping downward to the Thames, and drooping their willow and larch boughs into the water. De Vigne took the sculls, as in duty bound, and rowed her a good way down, under the arching branches; but though Lady Puffdoff put out all her charms, she could not lure De Vigne into anything as warm or tender as she would have liked; she was piqued—possibly what he wished to make her—bid him scull her back to the Dilcoosha, and, as soon as she was landed, went off to listen to Gardoni, with Crowndiamonds, Castleton's eldest brother, and a whole





troop of minor soupirants following and crowding round her. De Vigne was profoundly thankful to be released; he had a fancy to leave all these people and scenes, which were so stale to him and bored him to-day, though usually he was excessively fond of society, and to go and see Alma Tressillian, feeling a certain irresistible desire to have that little hand again in his, and hear the voice that had whispered him so soft a good night.

He knew the way by the river to St. Crucis, and turning from the gay party scattered over the picturesque grounds of the Dilcoosha, gathered in such groups as would have done for Boccaccio's stories or Watteau's pictures, he took the oars of the little boat which the Countess had just vacated, and pulled himself up the river to a point where he knew a path led to the farm-house, as he had once or twice walked down to the bank with Alma by it, and rowed her a mile or so on the water, amused with *her* amusement in seeing those steamers, barges, and cockle-shell boats in which Cockneys love to disport themselves on that certainly pretty, but, alas! how unodoriferous a stream.

He moored the boat to the bank, thinking of the careless days when he had pulled up the river with the Eton Eight, enjoying the glories of success at the Brocas and Little Surley with all the wild spirit and unsaddened ardor of boyhood, and walked onward to St. Crucis, with that swinging cavalry step which had beaten many good pedestrians and stalwart mountain guides in both hemispheres. He strode along, too, to uneasy thoughts; he was conscious of a keener desire to see the Little Tressillian than he would confess to himself, and, at the same time, he had a remorseful conviction that it might be better to stay away, a suggestion to which he was equally reluctant to listen. A quarter of an hour brought him in sight of St. Crucis; but with that sight he saw, too, what gave him no

remarkable pleasure—Curly, who had apparently forsaken the Dilcoosha for the same purpose as himself. Curly had just pushed open the gate and entered—entered as if he liked his destination; and De Vigne paused a moment behind him, under the road-side trees, wavering in his mind whether he should follow him or not. Where he stood he could see the garden, in all its untrained yet profuse summer beauty; the great chestnuts, with their green umbrageous boughs and snowy clustering blossoms, that the soft wind was scattering over the turf beneath them; and under the trees, on a rough bench, with her little black hat on her lap, and her palette and sketching-block at her feet, he saw Alma Tressillian, and beside her, bending eagerly forward, Vane Castleton. He, too, then, had left Sabretasche's fête to find his way after Alma! "Curse the fellow!" swore De Vigne, "how dare he come after her here?" If he had followed his instinct and his longing, he would have taken Castleton up by his coat-collar and kicked him out of the garden like a dog; though probably, for that matter, Castleton had as much right there as himself.

Curly had pushed open the gate and entered, and Alma, catching sight of him as he went across the garden, sprang up, left Castleton rather unceremoniously, and came to meet him with a glad greeting, and something of that gay, bright smile which De Vigne liked to consider his own and his unshared property. Curly answered it with an air more tender than mere compliment, and sat down beside her, giving Castleton such a glance as a man only gives to a rival who has forestalled him.

De Vigne took in the whole scene at a glance, and construed it as his skepticism and his knowledge of women suggested to him. The darker passions of his character rose up; the devil of jealousy entered into him; he turned

away in one of those moments of haughty anger and hot impatience which had sometimes cost him as much in one way as softer passions in another.

"She is a thorough-paced coquette, like all the rest," he thought. "I will not add another to the fools who pander to her vanity."

He swung round and retraced his steps, leaving Alma sitting under her favorite chestnut-trees with Castleton and Curly. It cut him to the soul that those men should be near her, having her smiles, looking in her eyes, teaching her the power, and, with the power, the artifices of her sex, gaining—who could say they would not?—one or other of them—their way into her heart! He was mad with himself for the jealousy he felt; and fiercely and futilely he tried to persuade himself, tried till at last he succeeded, that it was but his annoyance at finding Alma no more truthful or reliable than the rest of her sex, and his regret at the inevitable fate which would await Boughton Tressillian's adopted child if she listened to the love of Vane Castleton, or even of Curly; for Curly, though frank-hearted and honorable as a man could be, was young, wild, and held women lightly, as men of his age do.

All the fire—at all times more like a Southern than an English temperament—which lay asleep under the armor of ice which he had put on to guard himself from a sex that had wronged him, was stirred and kindled into flame. He might as yet seek to give them and conceal them to himself under other names, but at work within were his old foes—jealousy and passion. The gay glitter of society, as he joined a group under the fragrant limes of the Dilcoosha, where Violet, the Puffdoff, Madame de la Vieillecour, and others, were competing in skill as Toxophilites for some of the loveliest prizes Sabretasche had rifled from Howell and James's stores, seemed strangely at variance

with the tempest working up in his heart; and while he smiled and jested with the women there, he could not forget for one instant the Little Tressillian, as he had left her sitting under the great chestnut-boughs smiling on Curly and Vane Castleton. It was a far greater relief to him than he would own to himself, when not long afterward he saw Castleton discussing the merits and demerits of her bow with Ela Ashburnington; and in half an hour's time, or a trifle more, heard Curly chatting frothy badinage with empty-headed and sylph-waisted Mrs. Tite Delafield, though, following the dictates and bias of his nature, there was no bodily injury he could not have found it in his heart to wreak upon them both, even on his old Frestonhills pet, for having won those gay bright smiles under the chestnut-trees at St. Crucis.

He would scarcely have been less wrathful if he had heard Crowndiamonds saying to his brother,

"Where the deuce have you been to, Vane? Helena sent me to look for you, but I couldn't find you anywhere."

"I was after something far prettier than the old woman," was Castleton's *recherché* reply.

"Helena" was nobody less than my Lady Molyneux, with whom this noble scion of the House of Tiara had been *lié*, according to on dits, in a closer friendship than Jockey Jack would have relished had he not been taught to take such friendships as matters of course.

"I've been to see that little girl Tressillian—called to look at her pictures, of course; studios are deuced nice excuse, by Jove!"

And Lord Vane curled his whiskers and laughed at some joke not wholly explained.

"What, that little thing that was at Helena's last night," asked Crowndiamonds, "that you and the other fellows

made such a fuss about? Heaven knows why! she's too petite for me; and I can show you a score of ten times finer women in the coulisses any night. Besides, somebody said she was De Vigne's property!"

"What if she were? If he don't take care of his game, other men may poach it, mayn't they?"

The summer day passed away in colors to Violet as glorious as those that tinged its evening sky when the western sun went down behind the limes in its purpureal splendor, shrouding the evening star in its refulgence, and bathing in its golden glow every spear of grass that glittered in the dew. Bright as the day was Violet's glad enjoyment of it, brilliant as the sunset glories rose her present and her future; secure she felt from the gray twilight or the starless night, which overshadow the brightest human life not less surely than they overtake the fairest summer day. Of twilight taint, much less of midnight shadow, Violet's young and cloudless existence knew no fear. I have never seen on earth—not even imagined in song nor idealized in art—any face so expressive of perfect happiness and brilliant youth as hers. When it was in repose there was the light of a smile on her lips, and the joyousness of the spirit within seemed to linger far down in the sunny depths of her eyes, as on the violet waves of the Mediterranean we have seen the gleam and the glow of the rays from a sunrise hidden from our own view. It made one think of Petrarch's "*lampeggiar dell' angelico riso*," save that Violet's smile was more tender and more sure than the evanescent play of lightning; there was something in her face that touched even the most blasé and cynical among us, and subdued the most supercilious or systematic of all those women of the world into a vague regret for the spring-time of their days, when they, too, were in their beaux jours, and they, too, believed in Love and Life.

"Comme elle est heureuse !" said Madame de la Vieillecour to me—one of the Duchess's favorite affectations was never speaking her native language—"et elle doit l'être, cher Arthur; elle va épouser celui qu'elle adore !"

And madame heaved a sigh, as if she, too, might not have married where she had *said* she adored, if she had not worshiped more tenderly still the Vieillecour diamonds and thirty descents and ambassadorial splendor.

"Pardon, madame," said I, naïvely; "mais je croyais que l'adoration allait à tout le monde, *excepté*, à l'époux ?"

Madame colored through her dainty rouge, and sighed again.

"Ah, mon ami, ne vous moquez pas de moi. Vous ne concevez pas comment—nous autres femmes—nous sommes sacrifiées aux préjugés du monde !"

"Mais c'est un holocaust, madame," laughed I, "comme celui de Myrrha, présenté de très bonne volonté !"

The Duchess was annoyed, and, to punish me, forsook sentiment, and coquetted to desperation with a great pet of hers, a cousin of M. de la Vieillecour's, the Marquis de Larisse Torallié, over her favorite vanilla ice.

Perhaps she *did* regret for a fleeting moment—on the universal principle that what we have not must be better than what we have—that she had given up her girlish dreams for the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, pleasant pomps and vanities though they be, and high price as the most romantic idealist and the greatest saint will alike pay for them. Perhaps so: perhaps the heart of Gwen Brandling might not be wholly dead in the Duchess de la Vieillecour, though it was dead to me; and if it were not, Violet's fair face might well wake it up, stamped on that face as there were a mind beyond the glittering bagatelles of her rank, and a love that, like Francesca's, would endure in the midst of woe. I think

there were few of us who did not involuntarily wish her gladness—none of us who did not afterward remember the joyous beauty of Violet Molyneux that night. So brilliant and delicate a flower surely the tempest might have spared! Sabretasche, and his young love so soon to be his wife—to begin a life that would be to him new youth and to her the heaven of her ideal—gave themselves up to the intoxication of the hour. Never had either of them been more brilliant; never had Violet given freer rein to the joyous spirits of her nature; never had he more completely surrendered himself to the new happiness he had won! He loved her with a strangely tender love, intensified by the poetry and earnestness, amounting even to melancholy, natural to that part of his character which the world had never discovered in its courted and wearied man of fashion and of pleasure. He loved her, as we love very rarely, for

As those who dote on odors pluck the flowers,  
And place them on their breast, but place to die;  
Thus the frail beings we should fondly cherish  
Are laid within our bosoms but to perish.

He loved her *better* than himself. Sweet hours they passed together that day, fond words they spoke in the perfect union of their hearts, glowing ideals of their radiant future he whispered to her as, when they escaped unnoticed from the crowd, he led her through her own apartments, locked to the ingress of others.

"Ah! Violet, time has leaden wings!" he whispered, in the solitude of the conservatories, as the ball drew to a close, and her mother waited for her. "A fortnight is not long, yet to me, while it keeps you from me, it seems eternity! My love, my darling, every moment that we are parted is waste of life and loss of happiness. Would to God you were mine now!"

---

The soft rose-hue that wavered in her cheeks, the low sigh, love's tenderest interpreter, that parted her lips—breathed from the very fullness of her joy, as flowers in the noon sunlight droop their heads in ecstasy too great to bear—re-echoed his wish, though words were silent.

"You will love me always?" she whispered; "love me like this, Vivian; never less tenderly, never less warmly, never coolly, calmly, chillily, as men learn, they say, to love women whom they have won?"

"Never, my own love! Indifference, calmness, chill domestic affection were death to me as to you. My love has ever been as passionate as my native Southern suns; for you it will be as changeless and eternal."

"Then what can part us?" murmured Violet, lifting her face to his, with a smile upon her lips, and in her eyes the happiness secure from all terrors and all tarnish—happiness, tender, cloudless, and triumphant. "No power on earth! And so well do we love, that if death took one, he would strike the other!"

"Hush!" whispered Sabretasche, fondly. "Why speak of death or sorrow, my dearest? Our fate is life and joy, and life and joy together! We love; and in that word all the passionate happiness earth can know is given to us both."

He paused, and the silence that is sweeter than any words supplied his broken eloquence, stifled by its own joy, and Violet's upraised eyes gave him an answer fuller than any words, cold interpreters at best of the heart's deepest utterances.

When all his other guests had left the Dilcoosha, Lady Molyneux gave him the third seat in her carriage back to town. He needed to return in time for early parade, and the drive gave him an additional hour and a half with Violet. The summer dawn was very bright and still, with



not a trace of human life abroad, save some gardeners' carts wending their way slowly to Covent Garden with their fresh pile of newly-gathered vegetables or fragrant load of nodding hot-house flowers—flowers destined to wither in the soft, cruel hand of some jeweled beauty, or droop and die, pining for their native sunlight, under the smoke-shroud of the Great City, as sweet natures and warm hearts shrink or harden under the blight of a chill world or the pressure of an uncongenial existence. There was no sign of human life, but the birds were lifting up their little voices in their morning hymns, sweet gushes of natural song, and the dew was sparkling among the daisied grass, and the southerly wind was tossing the wayside boughs up in its play, and filling the air with a fragrance, brought miles and miles on its rapid wings from the free, fresh woodlands far away.

There was a soft sunshiny beauty in the summer dawn that chimed sweet cadence with their thoughts as Violet and Sabretasche drove homeward; while Lady Molyneux—worked throughout the season for fashion's sake as hard as Hood's poor shirtmaker for very life—slept, though she would have denied it, tranquilly and well, muffled in the swansdown of her opera-cloak. Violet and Sabretasche enjoyed the sweet daybreak as people do whose hearts are full of gladness; she, with that love of all fair things, and that susceptibility to externals natural to youth and to a heart that has never yet known care; he, with that capacity for happiness and that poetic keenness to all things beautiful in life and nature which had in boyhood made the murmur of the Mediterranean waves, or the setting of the sun, or the sighing of southern winds among the olive-groves, sufficient pleasure to his senses, and which had now awakened into new life, after long years of artificial glare and fashionable excitements, at the touch of real and un-

selfish love. With the song of the birds, and the gleam of the bright morning rays, and the sweep of the fresh west wind, their hearts beat in unison and joy. When the future is fair to us, how fair looks the green and laughing earth!

Violet looked up in her lover's eyes:

"Oh, Vivian, how beautiful is life!"

"With love!"

Life and love were both beautiful to him as he whispered a farewell but for a few hours in Violet's ear, bent his head for one soft though hurried kiss from the lips whose words of affection were consecrated as solely to him as their caresses, and descended from the carriage at the door of his house in Park Lane. God help him! hours of mortal anguish waited for him there.

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## II.

### PARK LANE.

It was past six o'clock when he reached his home, and, not caring to undress, Sabretasche threw himself down on one of the luxurious couches of that favorite room of his on the ground-floor, which adjoined and opened into his beloved studio, where the morning light, which he had bade his servants admit through the half-closed persiennes, fell full on his easel, on the portrait of Violet Molyneux (which he was doing in pastel for her father, the Francesca being hung in Violet's morning room at the Dilcoosha) which beamed from the canvas with such a radiant, animated, spirituelle light upon it, that it was hard to believe it was but paper and colored chalks. He lay full length upon the couch, smoking his perfumed narghilé, with that voluptuous indolence habitual to him—looking at the pic-

ture where his own art had re-created the beauty of his young love—feeling in memory the loving, lingering touch of her lips—and dreaming over that fresh happiness whose solitary reveries were dearer to him now than the society or the sleep which he had used to court as Lethean draughts.

His life had never seemed so sweet, the peace he had won so perfect; and when his servant rapped gently at the door, though infinitely too sweet-tempered, and, truth to tell, too lazy to irritate himself about trifles, he was annoyed and sorry to be disturbed.

"I told you not to interrupt me till I rang for my chocolate," he said, in that low voice which somehow or other gained him more obedience than the louder tone or more angry command of other men, from his servants, who stayed with him long, and liked no other service after his.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel," answered his man, submissively. "I should not have interrupted you, but there is a person asking to see you upon business, and, as he said it was of great importance, I did not know, sir, what would be best to do."

"What is always best to do is to obey me to the letter—you can never be wrong then. The person could have waited. What is his name?"

"He would not give it, sir; he wished to see you."

"I see no one before two o'clock in the day. Go, tell him so."

The man obeyed; but in a minute or two he returned.

"The gentleman will take no denial, Colonel. He begs you to see him."

"What an impertinent fellow!" said Sabretasche to himself, with a surprised hauteur on his delicate features. "Tell him I will *not* see him—that is sufficient. I see no one who does not send in his card."

"But, sir—but——"

"Well, what? Speak out," said Sabretasche, irritated at the disturbance. It seemed to let in the disagreeables of outer life, and jar on the sweet thoughts so dear to his poet's soul and lover's heart.

"But, sir, he says his business concerns you, and—and Miss Molyneux, sir."

The man hesitated—even servants living with Sabretasche caught something of his delicacy and refinement, and he knew intuitively how the mention of her name would annoy his master. A flush of astonishment and anger rose over Sabretasche's pale forehead. He was but too sensitive over Violet, perhaps, from what he considered as the deep disgrace of his first marriage, and he almost disliked to hear servants' lips breathe his idol's name. "Show him in," he said, briefly, signing the man away. He lay still, full length on the couch, smoking from his hookah, stroking the Cid with one hand, but the flush of anger had not left his face, and a vague dread had taken the place of his peaceful and luxurious happiness. His past had been too fateful for him to join in Violet's cloudless and fearless trust in the future. One of the bitterest curses of sorrow is the *fear* that it leaves behind it, making us, with the sweetest cup to our lips, dread the unseen hand that will dash it down, hanging the funereal pall of the past over the most glittering bridal clothes of the present, and poisoning the sunshine that lies before us with the memory of those clouds which, having so often come before, must, it seems to us, come yet again. When sorrow has once been upon us, we have no longer faith in life—we have but Hope, and Hope, God-given as she is, is but fearful, and fluttering, and evanescent at best.

He lay still; the fair morning sunlight falling clear upon him and upon the brilliant and witching face glowing on the easel at his side. Vulgar and cruel eyes looked in on

the scene—at the luxurious and beautiful studio, where every trifle was a gem of art; where the morning sunlight fell sweet and subdued through the rich folds of the curtains, and the air was redolent of a dreamy and delicious perfume—at the man of aristocracy and refinement, with all his grace and beauty, all his delicate and artistic surroundings; and a vulgar and cruel mind gloated with delight on the desolation and torture he had power to introduce into that peaceful and brilliant life. Sabretasche lifted his eyes with his characteristic indolence and hauteur—as he did so, the slight flush upon his face died utterly away; he grew pallid as death. He saw Guiseppe da' Castrone—the man linked with his hours of greatest shame, of most bitter misery—the brother and the emissary of his faithless wife. Involuntarily he rose, fascinated by the sight of the man connected with the deepest wrong and deepest sorrow of his life, and the Italian looked at him with a smile that showed his glittering white teeth, as a hound, who has seized the noblest of Highland royals at bay, shows his in the cruel struggle. Sabretasche spoke first, in Italian, with all the loathing that he felt for this man who had stooped to live upon gold wrung from the husband that his own sister had wronged.

“Signór Castrone, this is a very unexpected intrusion. Your negotiations with me are at an end. Allow me to request you to withdraw.”

“Wait one moment, Signór Sabretasche,” answered the Neapolitan, with a cunning leer in his bright sharp eyes. “*Are* our negotiations at an end?”

“So entirely, that if you do not leave my presence I shall be compelled to bid my servants make you.”

The Italian laughed. The cold, contemptuous tone of the high-born gentleman stung him, and gave him but the greater gusto for his task.

"Not so fast, buon' amico, not so fast; we are brothers-in-law, remember! It would not do for us to quarrel."

The blood crimsoned Sabretasche's face up to his very temples; a passion of scorn quivered over his delicate lips.

"The tie you dare to mention and appeal to, *ought* to be your bitterest disgrace. Since you are dead to shame, I need feel none for you; and if you do not leave the room, my servants will compel you."

"Per fede!" said the Italian, with a scoffing laugh. "You will scarcely call your household in to witness your connection with me. They can hear the secret if you choose; it matters nothing to me; only I fancied that now, of all times, you would rather have kept it under-hand. You are going to be married, caro, I hear, to a lovely English girl—is it not so?"

Sabretasche answered nothing, but stretched out his hand to the bell-handle in the wall nearest him. He felt it beneath him to bandy words with such a man as Giuseppe da' Castrone, who, a sort of gentlemanlike lazzarone, half swindler, half idler, a Southern *Bohémien*, had lived on his wits till, as inevitably in that precarious mode of subsistence, he had lost all the traces of honor, or delicacy, or better feeling, with which he perhaps might have begun life. He touched Sabretasche's wrist as the Colonel's white, slender hand was approaching the bell. Sabretasche flung off the grasp, as if it had been pollution; but before he could ring, the Neapolitan spoke, still with a smile, half cunning, half malicious:

"Would it not have been wiser, Eccellenza, before you had taken one wife, to have made sure you had lost the other?"

With all his calm nerve and habitual impassiveness, Sabretasche started, and a deadly anguish of dread fastened upon him. But he spoke with the proud and contemptuous

tone for which Castrone hated him so bitterly; for though he had done dirty tricks enough to brazen him to any shame, the Italian was still too sensitive, amid his coarseness, not to shrink from the disgust which the fastidious Englishman had never scrupled to conceal in the short interviews they had had during twenty long years.

"Yours is a very stale device," said Sabretasche, calmly. "Too melodramatic to extort money from me. If you want a few scudi to buy you macaroni, or game away at dominoes, ask for them in plain words, and I may give you them out of charity."

He stood leaning his arm upon the top of his easel; his tall and graceful figure erect; the pride of the patrician, and the scorn and loathing of the man of honor and refinement, written on his pale features, and in the depths of his soft, mournful eyes; speaking gently and slowly—but, how bitterly!—in his low, silvery voice. The tone, the glance, the mien, woke all the darkest malice that slept in the Italian's heart for his sister's high-born and high-souled husband. His eyes glittered like an angry animal's; he dropped the smoother tone which he had used before, for the one of coarse and malicious vindictiveness natural to him.

"Santa Maria! don't take that proud tone with me, carissimo, or I may make you glad to change it, and turn your threats into prayers. You are not quite so near happiness as you fancy, my fine gentleman. That is your young love's picture, no doubt? Ah! it is a fair face; it will go hard to lose it, I dare say? It would go harder still if one of the proud, fastidious Sabretasches were tried for bigamy! It would not look pretty in the London papers, where his name has been so often as a leader of fashion and——"

Before he could end his sentence Sabretasche had sprung

at him, rapidly and lightly as a panther, and seized him by the throat:

"Wretch, you lie! How dare you to insult me! By Heaven! if it were not too great honor for you, I would kill you where you stand!"

So fierce was the grasp of his white slender fingers, in the passion into which his sweet temper and gentle nature was at length roused, that the Italian, almost throttled, struggled with difficulty from his hold.

"You lie!" said Sabretasche, flinging him off with a force that sent him reeling from him. "The woman whom you venture to recall as my wife is dead!"

"Per Dio, is she? You will find to the contrary, bel signór. Basta! but your hands have no baby's grasp; you had better have joined them in prayer, best brother-in-law. If you marry the English beauty, you will have two wives on your shoulders, and one has been more than you have managed!"

Sabretasche's eyes were fixed upon him, fascinated by horror as an antelope by a rattlesnake. "Two wives—two wives!" he muttered incoherently, like a man in delirium. "She is dead, I tell you—she is dead!" Then the sense of what the Neapolitan had said came clearer to his mind, and, with an effort, he regained his calm and haughty tone, speaking slowly between his teeth: "Signór Castrone, once more I will request you, for your own sake, to leave this house quietly, without compelling me to the force I am loth to use, out of regard for the dead. With her, the grave buries all past errors; but with you, I still shall treat as with any other swindler and perjurer who tries to coin money through stories only fit to chicane boys. I am not a likely person to be terrified by secret innuendoes or open insults. This time I will let you go—you are beneath my anger—but if you intrude yourself



into this house, or venture to approach me again, I shall call in the law to rid me of a pest."

Something in his voice, which had ever a strange spell for man or woman, and which now, soft as it was in the utterance of his native Italian, bore that subtle magic of command which superiority of character and of mind always confer, had awed the coarser nature into silence while he spoke; but when he paused, Castrone broke out into a long, discordant, malicious laugh, jarring like jangled bells upon every nerve and chord in the listener's heart.

"Diavolo! buon' amico, it will be I, more likely, who have the law upon *you*! Sylvia is alive—alive! and your lawful wife, Colonel Sabretasche, from whom nothing but death can ever divorce you; and I do not think she loves you well enough, milor, to let another woman reign in her stead without making you pay the heaviest penalty she can for your double marriage! Wait! you saw the death of a Silvia da' Castrone in *Galignani*, I dare say? You had the certificate of such a death from Naples? Very possibly; but her aunt Silvia da' Castrone died last May in Naples, and it was her obituary that you saw. If Sylvia died, (as Santa Maria forbid!) it would be recorded as what she is, and what she will be while life lasts—however you may try to alter it—the wife of Vivian Sabretasche. Sylvia lives—nay, she is in London, ready to proclaim her right to your name to the Signorina Molyneux—is not that your new love?—or, if your union with the English girl takes place before she can do so, she will then prosecute you according to your English law. She was married in England, you remember; she has not lost the certificate, and the register is correct in Marylebone Church—I saw it but this morning. It is no idle tale, I tell you, buon' amico. I know you too well to try and palm one off upon *you* unless I could substantiate it. Your wife is alive,

fratello mio! I fear me there will be some few difficulties in the way of your marrying your young beauty!"

As the Italian spoke in his coarse brutal tones, with his low, malicious laugh like the hissing of a serpent, every word he uttered falling like seething fire on his listener's heart, Sabretasche stood gazing upon him. In his parted lips, his eyes wide opened with the horror of amazement on every feature, already blanched and wan, was marked the deadly anguish of despair, mingled with the vague and almost dreamy terror of this shock, so sudden and so horrible; then, as the full meaning of the words he heard cut gradually into his brain, his strength gave way, and he sank down upon his couch, covering his face with his hands, while great drops of agony stood upon his brow, and a bitter cry broke from the great passion that had grown and strengthened and entwined itself around his heart, till it were easier to drain that heart of its life-blood than its love.

The Neapolitan stood by, gloating at the ruin he had wrought, watching with the fiendish malice of a coarse and brutal nature the suffering of a higher and a nobler. He had often longed to revenge the silent scorn, the cutting contempt, the high-bred hauteur with which the man upon whose gold he lived had treated him; he had often thirsted for the time to come when Sabretasche should be humbled before him—when it should be his turn to hold the power which could at will remove or let fall the sword that hung above his victim's head—when it should be his to torture that only too sensitive and too deeply feeling nature, and to see, writhing in anguish before him, the haughty gentleman at whose glance and whose word he had so often flinched and slunk away. He stood by and watched him—unspeakably dear to the vindictive Italian was the mute anguish before him. Sabretasche had forgotten all sense

of his presence, all memory of the coarse, cruel eyes that saw the grief of one who so long had persuaded the world that he valued life too little to give it aught but smiles: heart, mind, and sense had all flown to her, his young, pure, true, idolized love, who now might never be his wife. The hissing, mocking tones of the Italian broke in on the sanctity of his silent grief. Castrone laughed the laugh of a devil at the fell despair wrought by his own work.

"Milor does not seem charmed to hear of his wife; it does not seem to bring him the connubial rapture one would expect?"

The jeer, the taunt, the mockery of his woe stung into madness the heart of the man whose over-refinement and susceptibility taught him to shrink even from the delicate sympathy of friends, and whose keen sensitiveness had oftentimes won him the imputation of lack of feeling, because he felt too deeply to bear to unveil his sorrows to the glare of daylight and the sneers of men.

Sabretasche started, as at the sharp touch of the knife at a fresh wound, and shivered as if with cold, the cold of death in Arctic regions. He lifted his face, aged in those brief moments as by long years of woe; but the old pride and shrinking refinement were not dead in him yet. He caught the eyes of Guiseppe da' Castrone; and though he had died, not another sign should have escaped him of the anguish which would have been food for ridicule and joy to the foe he loathed. But he could not hide his face from the Neapolitan's cruel gaze, and *there* the brother of his wife read desolation enough to satiate a fiend.

"If this alone were your errand," he said, with effort—and how hollow and altered his voice sounded even in his own ears—"you have no further excuse for intrusion. I shall take means for verifying your story; and now begone, while I can keep my hands from revenging your insults."

"Here is your proof," said Castrone, briefly.

Sabretasche mechanically read what he held to him; that too was brief.

"If you will it, you can see me once more to-day—but only to remind you that while I live no other can call herself your wife.

SYLVIA SABRETASCHE."

Though he had not seen it for more than twenty long years, he knew the writing to be his wife's—the woman from whom no laws would rid him. All hope died in him then; he *knew* that she lived—the wife who had wedded him to misery and disgrace; the wife who now came forward, after the absence and the silence of twenty years, to ban him from the better life to which a gentler and a purer hand was about to lead him.

"I see her!" he repeated, indignant passion flashing out amid the unutterable anguish of his face. "I see the woman who made my youth miserable, my manhood purposeless; who disgraced my name, who betrayed my love; who for twenty years has lived upon my gold, yet never addressed to me one word of repentance, regret, remorse; never one word to confess her crimes; never one prayer to ask forgiveness of her falsehood! I see her! How dare she ask it? How dare she sign herself by the name she has polluted? Go, tell her that she will bribe me no more, that she is free to do her worst that devils can prompt her, that she may proclaim her marriage with me far and wide; I care not! She may write her lying story in all the papers if she will; she may persuade all England and all Italy that she is a fond, deserted wife, and I a cruel, faithless husband; she may bring my name into courts if she choose, to sue me for her maintenance; but tell her, once for all, I give her no more bribes. I disown her,

though the laws will not divorce her. Now go; go, I tell you, or by Heaven I will not let you leave in peace!"

The fierce but coward nature of the Neapolitan quailed before the mighty anguish and concentrated passions flashing from the calm and melancholy eyes of the usually gentle and impassive Englishman. He spoke more softly, more timidly, smoothing down the coarseness of his natural tone.

"But, signór, listen. If you feel thus toward my poor sister, and will not believe that your hatred to her is without cause, would you not rather that the world knew nothing of your marriage?"

"Since it cannot be broken, all the world may know it. I will bribe you no longer. Begone!"

"Nay, one word—but one word, signór. If I could show you how you might still wed your young English love——"

How iron a nerve Sabretasche needed to still the anguish that seized him with the chill horror of a death spasm, as the Neapolitan's rough hand touched the dearest thought, the strongest passion, the wildest despair of his life, his love ever so tenacious over its secret, now full of such anguished tenderness! The struggle lasted but a moment, but that moment was time enough for the Neapolitan to note the torture he inflicted, while the fierce gesture of his listener warned him to hasten, if he would be heard; for coarse though Castrone's own thoughts were, and deadened his susceptibilities, instinct told him how sharper than a dagger's thrust, and more bitter than poison to the man of pride and reserve and refinement was this rending of the veil of the one sacred temple by a coarse and sacrilegious hand.

"Listen," he said in his sweet, swift language, with the glitter of cunning in his keen, bright eyes. "No one now

living knows of your union with my sister save yourself, and Sylvia, and I. It is utterly unknown in England; men do not dream that you are a married man, much less will they think of turning over the register of Marylebone Church for a date of more than twenty years ago. Your young love, her father, her friends, all your circle, need never know your wife is living unless you, or she, or I tell them. If any question ever arose about your first marriage, your word, and the certificate, if you had it, of a Silvia da' Castrone's death, (and our aunt Silvia was the same age as her niece,) would be amply sufficient. They would never insult a gentleman like Vivian Sabretasche by doubting his word, and prying into details of his past history! Sylvia and I are poor, signór mio, very poor; per Baccho, she has luxurious habits, and I—an Italian who is noble cannot soil his hands with work! We are South-erns, we love our dolce, our pleasure, our ease, and, Santa Maria! we have none of the three. Signór mio, we are as poor as the rats in the Vicaria; and if, as you say, you will not support your wife as you have done hitherto, she must apply to your law courts for maintenance. She *will* do so, and, basta! it is no more than her rights; had she followed my counsels, she would not have let them lie unas-serted so long. But she bids me make you this offer, and it is a noble and a generous one from a wronged woman; still, she feels that you hate her, and would not force her-self upon you, nor, now that her own life is blighted, ruin yours in return. If you will pay us down twenty thousand—it is but a drop in the ocean out of all your wealth—only twenty thousand, signór; we are very moderate!—we will bind ourselves—your wife and I, sole living witnesses of your marriage—by every oath most sacred in your eyes and in ours—(and we Catholics keep our oaths; we are not blasphemers like your churchmen, who kiss the book in

your law courts and perjure themselves five seconds after!)—we will swear by every oath in earth or heaven, never to reveal your marriage to any mortal soul. You may wed your young English love—see, her fair face woos you from the glowing canvas—she will never know that another lives who might dispute her title; you may win her and marry her; you may have all the rapture for which your heart thirsts. Men say you love her strangely well—and you are more than half Southern, signór; yours will be no calm and frigid happiness, such as content the cold, tame English. With that face—see how the fond, brilliant eyes follow you even from the dumb canvas, as though in prayer to you never to desert her—with that face beside you, that heart beating with yours, gods might envy you your paradise! And if *our* lips are silenced—and silent they will be as the grave—none need ever know, need ever guess that any woman ever bore your name before her. You need have no scruple, for, since you say you disown her, whatever the law decrees, you must feel as thoroughly divorced as though men's words had unlocked your fetters, and, per Dio! if twenty long years' separation is not divorce in Heaven's sight, what *is*? Accept Sylvia's offer—your marriage is virtually dissolved as though no tie of law existed—and long years of love and happiness await you with the woman you idolize. Refuse it, your marriage will be known all over England beyond hope of concealment or dissolution, and as long as her life lasts you will be the husband of my sister, and you will see your English girl the wedded wife of some other and some happier-fated man. Choose, signór—and the choice is very easy—you who have never hesitated to pay any price for pleasure, will hardly refuse so small a price for happiness! Choose, signór, the game is in your own hands."

With what subtle ingenuity, what devilish skill, was the

temptation put! The Neapolitan watched the speeding of his poisoned arrows, and saw that they had hit their quarry. Sabretasche leaned against the wall, pallid as the dead, his lips pressed in to keep down the agony within him to which he would not give vent; a shiver as though of icy cold again passed over his frame, burning as it was with feverish passions; he breathed in quick, short gasps, as if panting for very life; his eyes were fixed on what his tempter had truly termed that fond and brilliant face, whose loving gaze turned on him from the canvas, tempted him, how fiercely! how pitilessly! as woman's beauty has ever tempted man's honor to its fall, as the Philistine tempted the Nazarene from his vow, the Lydian Queen Alcmena's son from his strength, the Egyptian siren "lost Anthony" from glory, victory, and life! The Italian saw the struggle, and glugged in his vengeance. Heaven knows we need be strong indeed to suffer in such a struggle and come out victorious in the fight! Sabretasche had been more than mortal if he had not wavered and trembled under it; he to whom pleasure had been law, and to wish was to have! How fierce was the temptation no man could ever know! Was he a god to put aside the glittering cup of life, and take up with unshaking hand the deadly poison that would wither all the future?

On the one side was a brilliant and golden life for him and for the woman dearest to him on earth; on the other hand was desolation, dark, dreary, hopeless, for them both. Not he alone would suffer; it was her doom that his own will would seal, her head on which the blow would fall, unless he choose to arrest it; she out of whose young life he would crush all the glory; she whom he was called upon to murder with a more cruel stroke than the blow that honor forced from the Roman on his sons. If it had



chanced that he had lived in those stoic ages, and duty had bidden him slay the woman he loved, we in these later times should have mourned over his cruel fate, and marveled at the nerve that, armed by honor, could quench the light from those fond, tender eyes that only beamed for him; yet if *now* he shrink from striking the heart that trusts him, and hangs all its hopes upon him, with a far keener thrust, and banishing forever from her life its glorious and gracious youth, none will pity him, none excuse him that his hand may tremble, and his breaking heart may fail!

How fierce was the temptation! There on the lifeless easel beamed the fair, fond face, pleading for her joy and his own. Before him stretched two lives: one radiant and blessed, full of the love and rest for which his heart was weary, the beloved companionship, the sympathy of thought and feeling, all that makes existence of beauty and of value; the other dark and desolate, with no hope, no release from the chains that would fetter him as the bonds that bound the living man to the dead corpse, no relief from the haunting passions, the inextinguishable love which would burn within, till stilled in the cold slumber of the grave. All wooed him to the one; all nature, all manhood, all inborn affections rebelled against the other. He *had* disowned his wife; he knew that in the sight of God Violet alone could ever have right to bear the title. In his own heart he considered his marriage annulled since the day he left his wife in Naples, as virtually and as entirely as though dissolved by a jury's verdict; in his own heart he would have held himself fully justified if he had then wedded Violet by vows the most sacred human lips could frame.

All urged him to listen to his tempter—all—save honor, and that shrank from the stain of deceit and falsehood. He had paid down all prices save this for pleasure; he would

not pay this now, even though the barter were hell for heaven. He would himself have wagered life, or honor, or soul to win her, but for her sake he would not wrong her. His eyes were still fastened upon her picture, and there her eyes answered his—clear, fond, true, even while tempting him his better angel still. He could not win *her* by wrong, woo *her* with deception, stand beside the altar with her hand in his, and her gaze upon him, and vow there was no impediment between their marriage, while he knew that his first wife lived, who, however he might disown her, would have legal right to tear the wedding-ring from Violet's finger and deny her title to his name and home. He loved her, Heaven knows, better than life itself; he loved her too well to win her by a wrong, and all the knightly and high-souled thoughts that slept beneath the worldly exterior of the man of fashion and of pleasure revolted from the lie, the deception, and the shame of betraying a heart that trusted him by concealment and by falsehood. How could he give his darling his name, knowing it was not hers; call her his wife, knowing the title was denied her; live with her day by day, knowing at every moment he had wronged her and deceived her; receive her fond words, her innocent caresses, with the burden of that deadly shadow between them, which, if she saw it not, would never leave his sight, nor rid him of its haunting presence? Deadly was the temptation—deadly the struggle under it. His eyes were still fastened on the picture, whose brilliant beauty and grace stirred all his passions, but whose clear, true eyes still saved him from himself. Great drops stood upon his brow, his lips turned white as in the agonies of death, his hands clinched as in the combat with some actual foe, and the anguish of his heart broke out in a low moan :

“I have no strength for this !”

"Why endure it, then?" whispered the low, subtle voice of the Italian. "Freedom is in your own hands."

But the tempter had lost his power—the man whom the world said denied himself no pleasure and no wish, and whom society had whispered as a heartless and selfish libertine, put aside the joys that could only be bought with dishonor. His eyes flashed with concentrated passion, and over the death-like pallor of his face rose a deep crimson hue; he caught the slight form of the Neapolitan in his grasp:

"Hound! dare you tempt me to wrong *her*—take your price!"

He lifted him from the ground with the iron clasp of his left hand, opened the door of his studio, and threw him down the four steps that parted the chamber from the rest of the corridor leading to it. The Italian lay there, stunned for the moment with the fall; Sabretasche closed the door upon him, and went in again alone—alone, in what a solitude!

Long hours afterward he reissued from his chamber and entered his carriage, drawing down both blinds. A strange silence fell upon his house; many of his servants loved him, through a service of kindness on the one hand, and fidelity on the other, and they knew instinctively that some great sorrow had fallen on their master. Very few minutes took him to Lowndes Square. The footmen, accustomed to his entrance half a dozen times a day, were about to show him, unasked, to the room where Violet was; but Sabretasche signed them back, and went up the stairs to her boudoir alone. At the door he paused—what wonder? Could his heart help but fail him when he was about to quench all radiance from the eyes that took their brightness only from him? to carry the chill of death into a young life which had hitherto not known even a passing shade? to

say to the woman pledged to be his wife, "I am the husband of another!" It is no exaggeration that he would have gone with thanksgiving to his own grave; life could have no greater bitterness for him than this.

Many moments passed; the time told off by the thick, slow throbs of his heart; then he opened the door and entered.

Violet sat in her favorite rose-velvet chair, her birds singing above her head, rich-hued flowers around her; the sunshine full upon her delicate dress, her bright chestnut hair, her lovely face the incarnation of beauty, youth, and joy. She looked up as the door opened, dropped her book, and sprang forward to her lover, her hands outstretched, her smile full of delight and gladness; not even a trace of long passed shadows on the fair young brow that had never known care, or sorrow, or remorse. In her joy, not noticing the change upon his face, she welcomed him with fond words and fonder caresses, each touch of her soft lips falling on his cheek, to him like scorching fire.

"Oh, Vivian!" she cried, "you said you would be here four hours ago, and how I have been watching for you! If you knew how long ten minutes seem without you, you would never be away from me if you could help it. You know I don't believe in military duties! I should be your only thought."

She looked up in his face as she spoke the last words, but as she did so, her gay smile faded, and the sweet laughter from her eyes quenched in the shadow that already fell upon her from the curse he bore.

"Vivian, my darling! you are not well. Oh, Heaven! what is it?"

He pressed her madly in his arms. "Hush, hush, or you will kill me."

The color fled from her face; her eyes were full of piti-

ful fear and half-conscious anguish, like a startled deer catching the first distant ring of the hunters' feet. She hid her face upon his breast, and clung to him in dread of the unknown horror, while her voice rose in a plaintive cry, "Vivian, dearest! what has happened—no evil—to you?"

He held her in his arms as if no earthly power should rend her from him; and his lips quivered with anguish. "I *cannot* tell you—the worst that could happen to us both. Would to Heaven I had died ere I linked your fate to mine!"

Clinging to him more closely, she looked up into his burning and tearless eyes, full of such unutterable tenderness, such unspeakable despair; there she read or guessed the truth, and, with a bitter wail, her arms unloosed their clasp, and she sank down from his embrace, lying on the ground in all her delicate beauty, stricken by her great grief, crushed and unconscious, like broken flowers in a tempest.

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## PART THE SEVENTEENTH.

### I.

#### HOW VIOLET MOLYNEUX TRANSLATED FIDELITY.

CAN you not fancy how eagerly all town, ever on the *qui vive* after scandal and gossip, darted like the vultures on a dying lion on the story of Vivian Sabretasche's marriage? They were so outraged at its having been so long concealed so carefully, that those who collected scandales of their neighbors as industriously and persistently as Paris cheffoniers their rags, grubbing for them often in

quite as filthy places, revenged themselves for the wrong he had done them, by telling it, garbled and distorted in every way that could be suggested by malice and the inborn love in human nature for retailing evil of its kind. Heaven knows through whom it first chiefly spread, whether from the lips of my Lady Molyneux, who hated him and loved the telling, or through his wife and her brother, who probably supplied the *Court Talebearer*, the *St. James's Titletatler*, and such like journals with the vague, yet fully damnatory, versions that appeared in them of the "Early history of a Colonel in the Queen's cavalry, well known in fashionable circles as a dilettante, a *lion*, and a leader of ton, who has recently sought the hand of the beautiful daughter of an Irish Peer, and would have led her to the altar in a few days' time, but for the unhappy, yet, considering the circumstances, fortunate discovery of the existence of a first wife, concealed by Colonel S. for the space of twenty years, during which period, it is said, the unfortunate wife has lived upon extraneous charity, denied even the ordinary necessities of existence by her unnatural husband, who, having wooed her in a passing caprice, abandoned her when one would have supposed his extreme youth might have preserved him from the barbarity, and we, the moral censors of the age, must say, however reluctantly, villainy of such a course."

How it spread I cannot say. I only know it flew like wildfire. There were so many who hated him—as a man or a woman, superior in mind, or talent, or beauty, is certain to be hated by those who cringe the lowest and court with the grossest flattery. Men who envied him his careless successes in a thousand fields, who bore him malice for some mot, dropped in the abundance of his wit, that had hit some hypocrisy or petitesse, or owed him a grudge for that raffiné exclusiveness which made him shrink from any-

thing under-bred or affected; women who had loved that beautiful face and form, and had won no admiring glance in return, or who had only awoke from him that passagere eye passion which dies so soon, and now begrudged him to another younger and fairer. He had been passionately loved—he was hated in proportion; and all his “dearest friends” gluttoned over the story so long hidden from their inquiring eyes. Old dowagers mumbled it over their whist-tables, married beauties whispered it behind their fans, men gossiped of it in club-rooms; and in all was the version different. Men in general—save those jealous of him for having won Violet—took his part; but women—the soft-voiced murderers of so much fair fame—sided, without exception, against him; called him villain! betrayer! all the names in their sentimental vocabulary; pitied his “poor dear wife;” doubted not she was a sweet creature sacrificed and thrown away; lamented poor darling Violet’s fate, sighed over her infatuation for one against whom they had all warned her; and agreed that such a wretch should be excluded from society! Ah me! if it were the fashion to stone the angel Gabriel—were such an individual extant—I fear me the spotlessness of his wings would not spare him one blackening blow, but rather, the purer they were, the more would men delight in swearing them black as Erebus.

“I knew it!” said Lady Molyneux, with calm satiric bitterness, and that air of superiority which people assume when they give you what Madame de Staël wisely terms that “singulière” consolation, “Je l’avais bien dit!” “I knew it—I always told you what would come of that engagement—I was always certain what that man really was. To think of my poor sweet child running such a risk, it is too terrible! If the marriage had taken place before this éclaircissement, I positively could not have visited my own daughter. Too terrible—too terrible!”

"If it had done, Helena," answered her husband, "I think you might have 'countenanced' poor Vy without disgrace. She would have been, at least, faithful to *one*, which certain stories would say, my lady, you are not always so careful to be!"

The Viscountess deigned no reply to the coarse insinuation, but covered her face in her handkerchief, only repeating:

"I knew it! I knew it all along! If I had had my way, Violet would now be the honored wife of one of the first Peers of the——"

"If you *did* know it, madame," interrupted Jockey Jack, sharply—"if you did know poor Sabretasche's wife was alive, it's a pity you did not tell us so. I won't have him blamed; I tell you he's a splendid fellow—a splendid fellow—and the victim of a rascally woman. He can't marry poor little Vy, of course—more fools those who make the laws!—but I won't turn my back on him. He's not the only husband who has very good motives for divorce, though the facts may not be quite clear to satisfy the courts."

With which fling at his wife, honest Jockey Jack, moved with more or less sympathy, from personal motives, for his daughter's lover, took his hat and gloves, and banged out of the house, meeting on the door-step the Hon. Lascelles Fainéant, who had received that morning in his Albany chambers a delicate missive from his virtuous Viscountess, commencing "*Ami choisi de mon cœur.*" Honest Jack Molyneux sided with Sabretasche, and told the true story wherever he went; but he did not take up the cause as hotly as De Vigne, who, moved likewise, of course, by intense sympathy for his friend's fate, so similar to his own, was filled with a passionate grief and pity for his



wrongs, generous and vehement as his nature. When he was present he would never hear Sabretasche's history discussed—it was too private, he said, and too sacred to be touched: and I remember the first day the report was buzzed about town, and a young fellow, who had been blackballed at White's by the Colonel, was beginning to sneer and to jeer at the story, whose misery and whose majesty were alike so unintelligible to him, De Vigne gave him the lie direct, his noble face flushing with righteous wrath; hurled back in his teeth the insult to his absent friend, and would have further fought him out in Wormwood Scrubbs if the man had not made him a full recantation and apology.

So the journals teemed and the coteries gossiped of that great love whose depths they could neither guess at nor understand. Sabretasche's fastidious delicacy could no longer shield him from coarse remark and prying eyes. The marriage which he considered disgrace, the love which he held as the dearest and most sacred part of his life, were the themes of London gossip, to be treated with a jeer, or, at best, with what was far more distasteful to him, pity. However, scandal and the buzz of his circle, and the ill nature of his closest friends, were alike innocuous to him now; he neither knew nor heeded them, blind and deaf to all things, save his own utter anguish and the suffering of the woman who loved him. It was piteous, they tell me, to see the change in our radiant and beautiful Violet under the first grief of her life—and such grief! She awoke from her trance that day to an anguish that was almost delirium; and such a shock from a bright and laughing future to the utter desolation of a beggared present, has before now unseated intellects not perhaps the weaker for their extreme susceptibility. From wild *disconnected* utterances of passionate sorrow she would

sink into a silent, voiceless suffering, worse to witness than any tears or laments. She would lie in Sabretasche's arms, with her bright-haired head stricken to the dust for love of him, uttering low plaintive moans that entered his very soul with stabs far keener than the keenest steel; then she would cling to him, lifting her blanched face to his, praying to him never to leave her, or shrink still closer to him, praying to Heaven for mercy, and wishing she had died before she had brought sorrow on his head. It must have been a piteous sight—one to ring up from earth to Heaven to claim vengeance against the curse of laws that join hands set dead in wrath against each other, and part hearts formed for each other's joy and linked by holiest love.

It did not induce brain fever, or harm her so, belles lectrices. If we went down under every stroke in that way, as novelists assume, we should all be loved of Heaven if that love be shown by early graves, as the old Greeks say.

Violet's youth was great, her stamina good, and though, if fever had wrapped her unconscious in its embrace, it would have been happier for her, the young life flowed in her veins still purely and strongly under the dead weight that the mind bore. But for a day or so her reason seemed in danger; both were alike perilous to it—her passionate delirious agony or her mute tearless sorrow; and when her mother approached her, pouring in her commonplace sympathies, Violet gazed at her with an unconscious, bewildered look in those eyes, once so radiant with vivid intelligence, which made even Lady Molyneux shudder with a vague terror, and a consciousness of the presence of a grief far beyond her powers to cure or calm. Sabretasche alone had influence over her. With miraculous self-command and self-sacrifice, while his own heart was breaking, he calmed himself to calm her: he alone had any

power to soothe her, and he would surrender the right to none.

"You had better not see her again," her father said to him one day—"much better not, for both of you. No good can come of it, much harm may. You will not misunderstand me when I say I must put an end to your visits here. It gives me intense regret. I have not known you these past months without learning to admire and to esteem you; still, Sabretasche, you can well understand, that for poor Vy's sake——"

"Not see her again?" repeated Sabretasche, with something of his old sneering smile upon his worn, wearied, haggard features. "Are you human, Molyneux, that you say that coldly and calmly to a man whom you know, to win your daughter, would brave death and shame, heaven and hell, yet who loved her better than himself, and would not do her wrong, even to purchase the sole paradise he craves, the sole chance of joy earth will ever again offer him?"

"I know, I know," answered Jockey Jack, hastily. "You are a splendid fellow, Sabretasche. I honor you from my soul. I have told my wife so, I would tell any one so. At the same time, it is just *because*, God help you! you have such a passion for poor little Vy, that I tell you—and I mean it, too, and I think you must see it yourself—that you had far better not meet each other any more, and, indeed, I cannot, as her father, allow it——"

"No?" said Sabretasche, with a sternness and fierceness which Lord Molyneux had never imagined in his nature. "No? You side, then, my Lord Molyneux, with those who think, because misfortune has overtaken a man, he must have no mercy shown him. Listen to me! You are taking dangerous measures. I tell you that, so well *does Violet* love me, that I have but to say to her, 'Take

pity on me, and give yourself to me,' and I could make her leave you and her mother, her country and her friends, and follow me wherever I chose to lead her. If I exert my power over her, I believe that no authority of yours can or will keep her from me. It is not your word, nor society's dictum, that holds me back; it is solely and entirely because, young, pure-hearted, devoted as she is, I will not wrong her fond trust in me, by turning it to my own desires. I will not let my own passions blind me to what is right to her. I will not woo her in her extreme youth to a path which in maturer years she may live to regret and long to retrace. I will not do it. If I have not spared any other woman in my life, I will spare her. But, at the same time, I will not be parted from her utterly; I will not be compelled to forsake her in the hour of suffering I have brought upon her. As long as she loves me I will not entirely surrender her to you or to any other man. You judge rightly; I *dare* not be with her long. God help me! I should have no strength. A field is open now to every soldier; if my troop had not been ordered out, I should have exchanged, and gone on active service. My death would be the happiest thing for her; dead, I might be forgotten and—replaced; but for our farewell, eternal as it may be, I will choose my own hour. No man shall dictate or interfere between myself and Violet, who now *ought* to be—so near to one another!"

Sternly and passionately as he had spoken, his lips quivered, his voice sank to a hoarse whisper, and he turned his head away from the gaze of his fellow-man. The honest heart of blunt, simple, obtuse Jockey Jack stirred for once into sympathy with the susceptible, sensitive, passionate nature beside him. He was silent for a moment, revolving in his mind the strange problem of this deep and tender love his *daughter* had awakened, musing over a character

so unlike his own, so far above any with which he had come in contact. Then he stretched out his hand with a sudden impulse:

"Have your own way, you are right enough. I put more faith in your honor than in bars and bolts. If you love Violet thus, I can't say you shall not see her; her heart's nigh broken as it is. God help you both! I'll trust you with her as I would her brother!"

I think Sabretasche had pledged himself to more than he could have fulfilled. It would have been beyond the strength of man to have seen Violet's exquisite beauty crushed to earth for his sake, her brilliant and laughing eyes heavy with tears wrung from her heart's depths, her delicate rose-hued lips, pale and compressed over her white teeth, as if in suffering that for the love of him she denied utterance, her head, with its wealth of chestnut hair, bowed and bent with the weight of an anguish too great for her young life to bear;—to have heard her passionate bursts of sorrow, or, more pitiful still, the low moan with which she would lie for hours on the cushions of her boudoir, like a summer rose snapped off in the fury of a tempest, bewailing the loss of its fragrance and its beauty, and the fair, happy, sunny days that would never come again;—to be tortured with the touch of her soft hands clinging involuntarily to him, with her wild entreaties to him not to leave her, to let her see him every day, if he went away from her she should die! with her passionate words in calmer moments, promising eternal fidelity to him, and vowing to keep true to him, true as though she were his wife—as she had hoped to be;—it was more than the strength of man to endure all this, and keep his word so constantly in sight as never to whisper to her of possible joy, never to woo her to a forbidden *future*.

He *did* keep it, with iron nerve and giant self-subjection wonderful indeed in him, born in the voluptuous South, inheriting all its poetry and all its passion, and accustomed to an existence if of most refined still of most complete self-indulgence. He *did* keep it, though his heart would have broken—if hearts *did* break—in the agony crowded into those few brief days. Had his torture lasted longer, I doubt if he would have borne up against it; for, strong as his honor was, his love was stronger still, and he was, as his nature made him, a man of like passions with ourselves. But the English and French troops were gathering in the East; months before the Guards had tramped through London streets in the gray of the morning, with their band playing their old cheery tunes, and their Queen wishing them God speed. For several months in Woolwich Dockyards transports had been filling and ships weighing anchor, and decks crowding with line on line of troops; already through England, after a forty years' peace, the military spirit of the nation had awoke; the trumpet-call rang through the country, sounding far away through the length and breadth of the land, arousing the slumbering embers of war that had slept since Waterloo; already bitter partings were taking place in stately English homes, and by lowly farmstead hearths; and young gallant blood warmed for the strife, longing for the struggle to come, and knowing nothing of the deadly work of privation and disease, waiting, and chafing, and dying off under inaction, that was to be their doom. Ours were ordered to the Crimea with but a fortnight's time for preparation; where sharp work was to be done the Dashers were pretty sure to be in request. We were glad enough to catch a glimpse of active service and real life, after long years of dawdling in London drawing-rooms, and boring ourselves with the *ennui of pleasures of which we had long tired.* We had

plenty to do in the few days' notice—fresh harness, fresh horses, new rifles, and old liaisons; cases of Bass and cognac; partings with fair women; buying in camp furniture; burning the souvenirs of half a dozen seasons; the young ones thinking of Moore and Byron, the Bosphorus and veiled Haidées, we of Turkish tobacco, Syrian stallions, Miniés, and Long Enfields. We had all plenty to do, and the Crimea came to us as a good bit of fun, to take the place that year of the Western Highlands, the English open, or yachting up to Norway or through the Levant.

Heaven knows how Sabretasche broke the news to Violet, or how that young heart bore the last drop which filled her cup to overflowing. Lord Molyneux was true to his word; no strange eyes looked upon the sanctity of their grief; they had the only consolation left to them, they suffered together! Violet's first delirious madness had sunk now into a dull, mute, hopeless anguish, even still more pitiable to witness; her life, so full of brilliance and of beauty, seemed utterly stricken and broken down. She had been so used to sunshine! who could marvel that so delicate a flower, so used to cloudless skies and tropic warmth, was crushed under the first burst of the thunderstorm above her head. She tried her utmost to bear up against it, for his sake; she did her best to bear the curse of their mutual fate as well as she could, and she would give him a smile more sad than any tears, faint and wan as the pale autumn sunshine quivering on a corpse. If he had not been ordered to sail for the Crimea, I doubt if he could have kept his word to her father! From the hour she heard of his departure on foreign service, the nobler and stronger part of her character awoke, and she was worthier still of a man's whole life and love than in her *bright and laughing beauty*, in her deep and silent sorrow,

when for his sake she repressed the bitter utterances of despair, and, while her heart was bursting, tried, with a self-control wholly foreign to her impulsive and impetuous nature, to soothe him and to calm him under their mutual curse. Only now and then her courage broke down; then she would cling to him with a terrible brilliance in her hot dry eyes, moaning like a child delirious in pain, telling him he must not go, he would never come back to her again!

"I will not let you go," she cried; "you have made me love you, you have no right to leave me so. We may never meet again, you know, and when I am dead you cannot see me, and if you go away from me I shall die! I *cannot* live without ever seeing you. Think how long life is! I cannot bear it alone, always alone, always parted, you and I who were to be so happy. You shall *not* go!" she cried, her voice changing from a strangely dull and dreamy hopelessness into the wildness of despair. "You shall *not* go, they will keep you away from me, they will never let you see your poor Violet again, they will kill you in that cruel war! I will not let you go; you have a right to listen to me. I love you more dearly than any other woman ever did on earth!"

"Oh, Heaven!—hush!" cried Sabretasche, while the hands that clasped on hers trembled like a woman's. "Dear as your words are to me, do not speak them, if you would not drive me to madness. While you love me I will never utterly give you up. No power on earth shall condemn us all our lives to that absence which makes life worse than death, cursed with the desolation, but not blessed with the unconsciousness of the grave. But I *dare* not look at our future; as yet there is nothing for us but to suffer! My honor every way—as a soldier, as a man—bind me to leave you now. I stand pledged to take



my part in this Crimean campaign. For you I should break my word, for the first time in all my life—for Heaven's sake, my own love, do not tempt me——”

His voice sank into a hoarse, inarticulate murmur; and even while he bade her not to tempt him, he looked down into her eyes, whose brilliance was quenched in such bitter anguish, and pressed his lips on hers whose beauty lured him with such resistless strength. The sight of her up-raised face, the mocking vision of all that he had lost, the struggle in his own heart of love and honor, utterly unmanned him; his chest rose and fell with uncontrollable sobs; and large tears forced themselves from his burning eyes as he bowed his head upon his hands, convulsed with the emotion he had no power to subdue. Trembling and terrified at the grief, whose vehemence she could not soothe, since every fond word she uttered was but fuel to the flame, Violet knelt down beside him—roused out of her own almost delirious sorrow, to the innate unselfishness and heroism which lay in her heart, though her gay and careless life, joyous and thoughtless as a girl's could be, had never called them into play.

“Vivian, my darling,” she whispered, leaning her head against him, and clasping her fingers round his wrist to try and draw away one hand from his face, “you shall never hear another word from me to dissuade you from what you hold your duty as a soldier. You have never stained your honor yet; you shall not tarnish it for me! Go, since you must. I will try to bear it; though we are parted, my heart will not break while you still love me. Ours is no summer-day love to shake with every breath. Did we not promise to love one another, not for a day, not for a year, but for as long as our lives should last? and while we love, Vivian, we cannot be wholly parted. Heaven knows, that what we suffer is bitter as death; but suffering for you is

dearer to me than every joy that earth could give me with another. If I may not be your wife, I will be truer to you while my life lasts than ever any wife was to her husband. You need no vows, dearest, to tell you I shall be faithful!"

He did not answer, save with a sigh from his heart's depths, and, overwhelmed with the sight of the passionate grief she had no power to still, and to which she had no hope to offer, Violet bowed her head upon his arm, mingling in silent anguish her tears with his :

"God help us! what have we done to be forced to live apart—doomed to suffer like this?"

Sabretasche started violently at her piteous words, and sprang to his feet, his face pale as death, and his heart throbbing to suffocation. He clasped her in his arms and kissed her, more passionately than, as her affianced husband, he had ever done even in their sweet meetings and partings during their engagement, even on that night, when she first pledged herself to be his wife.

"Heaven guard you!—I dare stay no longer!—Be true to me if you would save me from madness," he murmured.—And he had left her before she could say one word to detain him.

I think his word to Lord Molyneux was very nearly being broken that day. If it had been, I think the blame would scarcely have rested upon Sabretasche more than upon the slave who, with the curse of iron fetters upon him, rebels against unnatural laws, and tries to struggle from the bondage which robs him of the sole thing that makes life of value—Liberty.

## II.

HOW A WOMAN MADE FEUD BETWEEN PALAMON AND AR-  
CITE, AND PASSION AWOKE TENFOLD STRONGER FOR ITS  
REST.

"COLONEL BRANDLING wishes to speak to you, Major," said his man to De Vigne, one morning when Granville was dressing, after exercising his troop up at Wormwood Scrubbs.

"Colonel Brandling? Ask him if he'd mind coming up to me here, if he's in a hurry," answered De Vigne going on brushing his whiskers. He did not bear Curly the greatest good-will since seeing him under the chestnut-trees at St. Crucis—where, by the way, he himself had not been since.

"May I come in, old fellow?" asked Curly's voice at the door.

"Certainly. Entrez!"

Curly came in accordingly, but not with his quick step and his gay voice; the one usually no heavier, the other not one whit less joyous, than in his boyish days at Frestonhills.

"You are an early visitor, Curly," said De Vigne, rather curtly. "I thought you'd prefer coming up here instead of waiting ten minutes while I washed my hands and put myself en bourgeois."

"Yes, I have come early," began Curly, so abstractedly that De Vigne swung round, looked at him, and noticed with astonishment that his light-hearted Frestonhills pet seemed strangely down in the mouth. Curly was distrait and absent; he looked worried, and there were dark circles beneath his eyes as of a man who has passed the night tossing on his bed to painful thoughts.

"What's the matter, Curly?" asked De Vigne. "Has Heliotrope gone lame, Lord Ormolu turned crusty, Eudoxie Lemaire deserted you, or what is it?"

Curly smiled, but very sadly.

"Nothing new; I have made a fool of myself, that's all."

"And are come to me for auricular confession? What is the matter, Curly?" asked De Vigne, his anger vanishing at once, and his interest awakening; for he had had a real and cordial affection for Curly ever since he had championed and petted the boy at Frestonhills.

"Imprimis, I have asked a woman to be my wife," answered Curly, with a nervous laugh, playing with the bouquet bottles on the table.

De Vigne started perceptibly; he looked up with a rapid glance of interrogation, but he did not speak, except a rather haughty and impatient "Indeed!"

Curly did not notice his manner, he was too ill at ease, too thoroughly absorbed in his own thoughts, too entirely at a loss, for the first time in his life, how to express what he wanted to say. Curly had often come to De Vigne with the embarrassments and difficulties of his life; when he had dropped more over the Oaks than he knew exactly how to pay, or entangled himself where a tigress grip held him tighter than he relished; but there are other things that a man cannot so readily say to another, and I have often noticed that the deeper any feelings are, or the more they do him honor, the more reluctant is he to drag them into daylight and hold them up for show.

"Well?" said De Vigne, impatient at his silence, and more anxious, perhaps, than he would have allowed to hear the end of these confessions. "Certainly the step shows no great wisdom; but marriages are general enough, and you have wiser men than either you or I,

sharers in the hallucination. Who has bewitched you into it?"

"You can guess, I should say."

"Not I; I am no Œdipus; and of all riddles, men's folly with women is the hardest to be read."

"Yet you might. Who can be with her and resist her——"

"Her?—who? Speak intelligibly, Carly," said De Vigne, irritably. "Remember your lover's raptures are Arabic to me."

"In a word, then," said Carly, hurriedly, "I love Alma Tressillian, and I have told her so."

De Vigne's eyebrows contracted, his lips turned pale, and he set them into a hard straight line, as I have seen him when suffering severe physical pain.

"She has accepted you, of course?"

Had Carly been less preoccupied, he must have thought her huskily and coldly the question was spoken.

Curly shook his head.

"No?" exclaimed De Vigne, his eyes lighting up from their haughty impassibility into passionate eagerness.

"No! Plenty of women have loved me, too; yet when I am more in earnest than I ever was, I can awaken no response. I love her very dearly, Heaven knows, as truly and as tenderly as man can love woman. I would give her my name, my rank, my riches, were they a thousand times greater than they are; and if I were a poor man I would work for her night and day, and think no poverty sad, no travail hard, if it were only for her sake. Good Heavens! it seems very bitter that love like mine should count for nothing, when other men, only seeking to gratify their passions or gain their own selfish ends, win all before them."

*His voice trembled as he spoke; his gay and careless*

spirits were beaten down; for the first time in his bright butterfly life Sorrow had come upon him. Its touch is death, and its breath the chill air of the charnel-house, even when we have had it by us waking and sleeping, in our bed and at our board, peopling our solitude and poisoning our Falernian, rising with the morning sun and with the evening stars;—how much heavier then must be the iron hand, how much more chill its breath, ~~ice~~ cold as the air of a grave, to one who has never known its presence!

Wer nie sein Brod mit Tränen ass,  
Wer nicht die kummervollen Nächte.  
Auf seinem Bette weinend sass  
Der kent euch nicht ihr himlischen Mächte.

Curly's voice trembled; he leaned his arm on the dressing-table, and his head upon his hand; his rejection had cut him more keenly to the heart than he cared another man should see. De Vigne stood still, an eager gladness in his eyes, a faint flush of color on the marble-like pallor of his face, his heart beating freely and his pulses throbbing quickly; that vehement and exultant joy of which his nature was capable stirred in him at the thought of Curly's rejection. We never know how we value a thing till its loss is threatened!

He did not answer for some moments; then he laid his hand on Curly's shoulder with that old gentleness he had always used to his old Frestonhills favorite.

"Dear old fellow, it is hard. I am very——"

He stopped abruptly; he would have added, "sorry for you," but De Vigne knew that he was *not* sorry in his heart, and the innate truth that was in the man checked the lie that conventionality would have pardoned.

Curly threw off his hand and started to his feet. Something in De Vigne's tone struck on his lover's keen senses

with a suspicion that before had never crossed him, absorbed as he had been in his own love for the Little Tressillian, and his own hopes and fears for his favor in her eyes.

"Spare yourself the falsehood," he said, coldly, as *he* had never spoken before to his idolized "senior pupil." "Commiseration from a rival is simply insult."

"A rival?" repeated De Vigne, that fiery blood of his always ready—too ready, at times—to rise up in anger, even when not "just," as Mr. Tupper exacts.

"Yes, and a successful one, perhaps," said Curly as hotly, for at the sting of jealousy the sweetest temper can turn into hate. "You could not say, on your honor, De Vigne, that my rejection by her gives you pain. If you did your face would belie you. You love her as well as I; you are jealous over her; perhaps you know that she returns it; perhaps you have already taken advantage of her youth and her ignorance of the world and her trust in you, to sacrifice her to your own inconstant passions——"

"Silence!" said De Vigne, fiercely. "No other man would I allow to say such words unpunished. Your very supposition is an insult to my honor."

"Do you care nothing for her, then?" interrupted Curly. His heart was set on the Little Tressillian. He believed his rival stood before him, and in such moods men cast reason, temperance, old friendship, to the winds.

The dark passionate blood of his race rose over De Vigne's forehead; his eyes lighted; he looked like a lion longing to spring upon his foe. *He* to have his heart probed rudely like this—to endure to have his dearest secrets dragged to daylight by this boy's hands—*he* to be questioned, counseled, arraigned in accusation by another man! Curly had forgotten his character, or he would have hardly thought to gain his secret by provocation and

condemnation. De Vigne restrained his anger only by a mighty effort of will, and he threw back his hand with that haughty gesture and that scornful impatient smile on his delicately cut lips, habitually expressive with him of contemptuous irritation.

"If you came here to cross-question me, you were singularly unwise. I am not very likely to be patient under such treatment. Whatever my feelings might be on any subject of the kind, do you suppose it is probable I should confide them to you?"

So haughtily careless was his tone, that Curly, catching at straws as men in love will do, began to hope that De Vigne, cold and cynical as he had been to women ever since his fatal marriage, might, after all, be indifferent to his protégée.

"If it be an insult to your honor, then," he said, eagerly, "to hint that you love her, or think of her otherwise than as a sister, you can have no objection to do for me what I came to ask of you."

"What is that?" asked De Vigne, coldly. He could not forgive Curly any of his words; if he resented the accusation of loving Alma, because it struck harshly on what he was always very tenacious over—his confidence and his private feelings—and startled him into consciousness of what he had been unwilling to admit to himself, he resented still more the supposition that he cared for Alma as a sister, since it involved the deduction that she might love him—as a brother! And that fraternal calmness of affection ill chimed in with an impetuous nature that knew few shades between hate and love, between profound indifference or entire possession!

"Alma rejected me!" answered poor Curly; all the unconscious dignity of sorrow was lent to his still girlish and Greek-like beauty, and a sadness strangely calm and



deep for his gay insouciant character had settled in his laughing blue eyes. "I offered her what few men would have thought it necessary to offer her, unprotected as she is—my name and my rank, such as they are; and had I owned the dignities of an empire, I would have raised her to my throne, and thought she graced it. I offered her all that a man can, his tenderness, his fidelity, his protection. I told her how I loved her, and—God help me!—that is very dearly. Yet she rejected me, though gently and tenderly, for she has nothing harsh in her. But sometimes we know a woman's refusal is not positive; it may come from girlish indecision, caprice, want of thought, waywardness, timidity, a hundred things, which afterward they may repent, when they remember how rare to find true love is in the world. I thought that perhaps (you have great influence over her as her grandfather's friend) you could put this before her; persuade her at the least not to deny me all hope; plead my cause with her; ask her to let me wait,—if it were even as long as Jacob for Rachel, I would bear it. I would try to be more worthy of her, to make her fonder of me. I would shake off the idleness and uselessness of my present life. I would gain a name that would do her honor. I would do anything, everything, if *only* she would give me hope!"

He spoke fervently and earnestly; pale as death with the love that brought no joy upon its wings; his slender fair hands clinched in the misery to which he gave no utterance; his delicate girlish face stamped pitifully with anguish of uncontrollable anxiety, yet with a new nobility from the chivalric honor and high devotedness which Alma had awakened in him.

He was silent—and De Vigne as well. De Vigne leaned against one of the windows of his bed-room, his face turned *away from* Curly, and his eyes fixed on the gay street

below. He was as pale as his rival, and he breathed shortly and fast. Curly's words stirred him strangely: perhaps they revealed his own heart to him; perhaps they, in their earnestness and unselfishness, contrasted with such love as he had always known; perhaps they stung him with the thought, how much better sheltered from the storms of passion and the chill blasts of the world in Curly's bosom, than in his own, would be this fragile and soft-winged little dove, now coveted by both.

He did not answer; Curly repeated his question in low tones.

"De Vigne! will you do it? Will you plead my cause with her? If she be so little to you it will cost you nothing!"

Again he did not answer, the question struck too closely home. It woke up in all its force the passion which had before slumbered in some unconsciousness. When asked to give her to another, he learned how dear she was to himself. Hot and jealous by nature as a Southern, how could *he*, though he might be generous and just, plead with her to give the joys to his rival of which a cruel fate had robbed him? how could *he* give the woman he would win for himself, away to the arms of another?

"Answer me, De Vigne. Yes or no?"

"No!"

And haughtily calm as the response was, in his heart went up a bitter cry, "God help me. *I cannot!*"

"Then you love her, and have lied!"

De Vigne sprang forward like a tiger at the hiss of the murderous and cowardly bullet that has roused him from his lair; the fire of just anger now burned in his dark eyes, and his teeth were set like a man who holds his vengeance with difficulty in check. Involuntarily he lifted his right arm; *another* man he would have struck down at

his feet for that dastard word. But with an effort—how great only those who knew his nature could appreciate—he held his anger in, as he would have held a chafing and fiery steed with iron hand upon its reins; and he lifted his grand head with a noble and knightly air:

“Your love has maddened you, or you would scarcely have dared to use that word to me. If I did not pity you, and if I had not liked you since you were a little fair-faced boy, I should make you answer for that insult in other ways than speech. If I *were* to love any woman, what right have you to dictate to me my actions or dispute my will? You might know of old that I suffer from no man’s interference with me and mine.”

“I have no power to dispute your will,” interrupted Curly, “nor to arrest your actions. Would to Heaven I had! But as a man who loves her truly and honorably himself, I will tell you, whether I have right or no, that no prevarication on your part hides from me that you at least share my madness; and I will tell you, too, though you slew me for it to-morrow, that she is too fond, too true, too pure to be made the plaything of your fickle passions, and cast off when you are weary of her face and seek a newer mistress. I will tell you that the man who wrongs her trust in him, and betrays her guileless frankness, will carry a sin in his bosom greater than Cain’s fratricide; and I will tell you that, if you go on as you have done from day to day, concealing your marriage, yet knitting her heart to yours—if you do not at once reveal your history to her, and leave her free to act for herself, to love you or to leave you, to save herself from you or to sacrifice herself for you, as she please, that for all your unstained name and unsuspected honor, *I* shall call you a coward!”

“My God!” muttered De Vigne, “that I should live to

hear another man speak such words to me. I wonder I do not kill you where you stand !”

I wonder, too, he kept down his wrath even to the point he did, for De Vigne's nature had no trace of the lamb in it, and to attack his honor was a worse crime than to attack his life. His lips grew white, his eyes black as night, and literally lurid with flame; he pressed his hand upon his heart—the old gesture he had used in the church at Vigne upon his marriage-day. Curly stood opposite to him, slight and fair as the Slayer of the Python, a deep flush on his delicate cheeks, and dark circles under his clear blue eyes. Deadly passion was between those two men then, sweeping away all ancient memories of boyish days, all gentler touches of brighter hours and kinder communion. The fatal love of woman had come between, cut down, supplanted, and destroyed the friendship of the men. Their eyes met—fierce, steady, full of fire, and love, and hate; De Vigne's hand clinched harder on his breast, and with the other he signed him to the door. The wildest passions were at war within him; his instinct thirsted to revenge the first insult he had ever known, yet his kingly soul, at the daring that defied him, yielded something like that knightly admiration with which the Thirty looked upon the Thirty when the sun went down on Carnac.

“Go—go! I honor you for your defense of her, but such words as have passed between us no blood can wash out, nor after words efface !”

Curly bent his head and left him; he had done all he could. When they met again——! Ah! God knows if our meetings were foreseen many voices would be softer, many farewells warmer, many lips that smile would quiver, many eyes that laugh would linger long with salt tears in them, many hands would never quit their clasp that touch another with light careless grasp, at partings where no prescience warns, no second-sight can guide !

Curly left him, and De Vigne threw himself into an arm-chair, all the fiery thoughts roused in him beating like the strong pinions of chained eagles. The passions which had already cost him so much, and which from his fatal marriage-day he had vowed should never regain their Circean hold upon him, were now let loose, and rioted in his heart. He knew that he loved Alma, as he had sworn to himself never to love woman. He knew that, strong in his own strength, he had gone down before her; that the honor and the pride on which he had piqued himself had been futile to save him from the danger which he had so scornfully derided and recklessly provoked; that his own iron will, on which he had so fearlessly relied, had been powerless to hold him back from the old intoxication, whose fiery draught had poisoned him even in its sweetness, and to whose delirium he had vowed never again to succumb. He loved Alma passionately, madly, as he always had loved, as he always would love, yet with a tenfold force and fascination from the vehemence of his nature, which had intensified with his maturer manhood; and from the fervor, the truth, the warmth, the delicacy of her unusual and winning character—a character which offered so marked a contrast to the women he had wooed before her, where he found no mean between impudence and prudery, boldness or affectation; where either coarseness courted him, or else mock-modesty chilled him; with whom he found passion either a dead letter, or else distorted into vice; and in whom he saw no virtue save such as was a cover to hideous sins, or dictated by cold prudence and conventional selfishness, and a wise regard to their own social interests.

He loved her, and De Vigne was not a man cold enough, or, as the world would phrase it, virtuous enough, to say *to the woman* he idolized, “Flee from me—society will not

smile upon our love!" Yet his knowledge that there had arisen between them that "lovely and fearful thing" grafted in us by nature and inherited with life; that love which, blessed, gives "greenness to the grass and glory to the flower," and, cursed, blights all creation with its breath; came to him with bitter thoughts more like the heritage of woe than joy. Many of Curly's words had struck into his brain with marks of fire. "Going on as you have done day by day, deceiving her by concealment of your marriage, yet knitting her heart to yours!" These stung him cruelly, for, of all things, De Vigne abhorred concealment or cowardice; of all men he was most punctilious in his ideas of truth and honor, and his conscience told him that had he acted straightforwardly, or, for her, wisely, he would have let Alma know, in the earliest days of their intimacy, of the cruel ties of church and laws that fettered him with so uncongenial and so unmerited a chain. True, he had never concealed it from bad motives; it was solely his disgust at every thought of the Trefusis, and the semi-oblivion into which—never seeing his wife to remind him of it—the bare fact of his so-called marriage had sunk, which had prevented his revealing it to Alma. He had never thought the matter would be of consequence to her; he had looked on her as a mere acquaintance, and it had no more occurred to him to tell her his history than it had done to talk it over in the clubs. You must know by this time as well as I that De Vigne was as reserved as he was impatient of all meddling with his concerns; still, that imputation of want of candor, of lacking to a young girl the honor he had been ever so scrupulous in yielding to men, stung him to the quick. Other words, too, lingered on his mind, bringing with them that keen, sharp pain, that stifling, agonized longing for certainty, like the parched thirst for water in a desert, that fastens on us with the

doubt of our love being fully answered. "If you only think of her as a sister," chilled him with a breath of ice: for the first time it suggested to him that Alma, frank, fond, demonstrative as she was to him, might also think of him as—a brother. She was always gay and candid with him; she always showed him without disguise her delight in his presence, her grief at his absence; she said everything to him that entered her mind, and spoke out of her heart to him fearlessly and lovingly. There was none of the orthodox timidity, reserve, and blushing confusion popularly and poetically associated with the dawn of love—signs such as De Vigne had seen, either natural or affected, in most women. Perhaps Alma's frankness and fondness were too demonstrative to be deep; perhaps the affection she felt for him was the gay, grateful affection of a young girl for a man who had been her kindest friend and most congenial companion, not the ardent and impassioned love of which he knew, by her eyes and her character, Alma would some day be capable. The doubt was to him like the bitterness of death. It *should* not have been, we know, had he been unselfish as he ought; he *should* have prayed for punishment to fall upon his head, and for her to be spared the fruits of his own imprudence; but what man among us can put his hand upon his heart, and say before God that he could have summoned up such unselfishness under such a temptation? Not I—not you—not Granville De Vigne, for, as Sabretasche would have said, we are unhappily mortal, mon ami!

The doubt was as the bitterness of death, yet he knew that for her sake he ought to wish that the doubt might be solved against him. Heaven knows, he suffered enough in that hell of thought, whose tortures far excel the material hell of Milton or of Dante! Remorse for his own obstinacy of will, which would see no danger for himself in his care-

less intercourse with an attractive woman whom he persisted in regarding as a winning child;—regret for his defalcation in that straightforward honor and uncompromising truth which had been his guiding star and idol through all his life;—agony at the memory of that mad marriage which now deprived him of his right of liberty and free action through the fetters flung over him by an arch-intrigante, whose crime was upheld by an illiberal church and cruel laws;—dread anxiety to know whether or not Alma Tressillian loved him, though how that love might end for both he never paused to ask;—all these made a tempest in his heart fiercer even than that which had raged there on the fatal day whose after-consequences had chained his hands and ruined his manhood.

One resolution he made amid the whirl of thoughts and feelings which the stormy scene with Curly had so unexpectedly called into life—that was to tell her of his marriage at once, or, rather, (for marriage it was not,) of the false system of society and the iron fetters of a tie which could be as nothing in the eyes of reason and justice, which now held him back from the only *true* marriage—where love secures fidelity and heart weds heart—rare enough, God knows!—too rare to be forbidden by man to man! He resolved to tell her, fiery as his struggle was with himself; for the name of The Trefusis was hateful to him to breathe, even to those who knew his history. Perhaps there mingled with it some thought that by Alma's reception of it he would see how little or how much she cared for him. I know not; if there were, I dare throw no stone at him. How many of my motives—how many of yours—of any man's, are unmixed and undefiled? He resolved to tell her, to be cold and guarded with her, to let her see no sign or shadow of the passion she had awakened. All his past warnings had failed to teach him wisdom; he



still trusted in his own strength, still believed his will powerful enough to hold his love down without word or token of it, while it gnawed at his heart-strings in the very presence of the woman who had awakened it! Once more Granville De Vigne had gone down before his old foe and siren, Passion; like Sisera before the treacherous wife of Heber the Kenite, at her feet he bowed and fell—and in that strange delirium men “know not what they do!”

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## PART THE EIGHTEENTH.

### I.

#### THE ORDEAL BY FIRE.

THE summer day was beautifully soft and sultry as he rode down the road to Richmond. A thunder-storm in the early morning had purified but not chilled the air; the roads were sparkling still with moisture; the grasses, heavy with dew, glittered like emeralds in the sunlight; the little birds were twittering and singing in sweet abrupt gushes and ~~rolls~~ of impromptu music; the deer in the park lifted their head now and then for a clear bell of delight, and trooped with stately grace along the scented turf into the shadows of the trees, which moved their glistening leaves at the low summer wind, as it shook off from their luxuriant foliage noiseless showers of rain drops, that fell with silent foot-falls on the fern branches below.

There was the glorious beauty of the “glad summer-time” in the fragrant air, and on the moistened roads, and on the rich sylvan breath of the green woodlands, but it *never* reached his eyes, or heart, or senses, deeply as at

another time it would have stirred his inborn love of nature, as De Vigne rode on, spurring his horse into a mad gallop, with that one world within him which blinds a man to all the rest of earth. He galloped on and on, never slackening his pace; for the first time in all his soldier's life he felt *dread*—dread of telling the woman he loved that he was tied to the woman he hated; *not* for the first time, yet quicker than ever before, his pulse throbbed, and his heart beat loudly and rapidly, at the thought of the Little Tresillian. They throbbed much faster, and beat much quicker still, as he came in sight of the farm-house of St. Crucis, and saw coming out of the little gate, and taking his horse's bridle off the post—Vane Castleton.

"Good Heavens!" thought De Vigne, with a deadly anguish tightening at his heart, "is she, then, like the rest? Has she duped us all? Is her guileless frankness as great a lie as other women's artifice?"

Castleton did not see him; he threw himself across his bay and rode down the opposite road. De Vigne wavered a moment; skeptical as he was, he was almost ready to turn his horse's head and leave her, never to see her again. If she chose Vane Castleton, let him have her! But love conquered; the girl's face had grown too dear to him for him of his own act never to look upon it again. He flung his bridle over the gate, pushed the little wicket open, and entered the garden. In the window, with her eyes lifted upward to a lark singing far above in the blue ether, the chestnut-boughs hanging over her in their dark-green framework, the honey-suckles and china roses bending down till they touched her shining golden hair, her cheeks a little flushed, and on her young face all that vivid intelligence, refined delicacy, and impassionate feeling which formed her strongest, because her rarest, charm for him, was Little Alma. At the sight of her, he trembled like a

woman, with the passion that had grown silently up, and ripened into such sudden force from the night of the Molyneux ball. How *could* he give her up to any living man? Right or wrong, how could he so tame down his inborn nature as to wish to win from such a woman only the calm, chill affection of a sister?

That mad jealousy which almost always accompanies strong love, especially when that love is uncertain of having awakened any response, and which had awoke in all its fire at the sight of Vane Castleton, and the suspicion that it was for Castleton's sake and not for his own that she had rejected Curly's suit, drove all memory of The Trefusis, all recollection of what he came to avow to Alma, from his mind!

He stood and looked at her—the wild throbbing of his heart, the rush of all that inexpressible delirium, half rapture and half suffering, which, for long years, none of her sex had had the power to rouse in him, told him that he should not dare to trust himself in her presence, for no will, however strong, could have strength enough to tame its fever down and chill his veins into ice-water. Still he lingered, not master of himself; the unnatural calmness, the acquired self-control with which he had of late banished, and, as he believed, silenced forever those warmer and fonder impulses that had been born with him, were lost. The man's nature, alive and vigorous, rebelled against the stoicism he had thought to graft upon it, and flung off the cold and alien bonds of the chill philosophy circumstances had taught him to adopt. His heart was made for the passionate joys of love; and against the reason of his mind it demanded its rights and clamored for his freedom. He lingered there, loth—who can marvel?—to close upon himself the golden gates of a fuller, sweeter, more glorious existence; and turn away to bear an unmerited curse

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alone—a wanderer from that Eden which was his right and heritage as a man. He lingered—then she looked up and saw him, her lips parted with a low, glad cry, the rose flush deepened in her cheeks, the first blush she had ever given for him. She sprang down from the window, which was scarcely a foot above the ground, ran across the lawn as lightly as a fawn, and stood by his side.

“Oh, Sir Folko! how long you have been away!”

How could he leave her then? If he could have done, I fancy he would have been one of the impossible creations of romance, pulseless and bloodless as marble gods—not one of the warm, impulsive, erring sons of earth, a man, as I say, of like passions with ourselves.

She came and stood by him; her golden hair nearly touching his arm, her little soft fingers still on his hand, her glad beaming face turned up to his with the full glow of the afternoon sunshine upon it, her eyes raised with joyous tenderness in their clear regard, yet far down in their dark-blue depths, that enthusiasm, sensitiveness, and intensity of feeling of which the heart that shone through them was capable. She stood by him, only thinking of her happiness at seeing him, never dreaming of the torture her presence was to him—a torment yet an ecstasy, like the exultation and the awakening of an opium-smoker combined in one. Seeing her thus, with her hand in his, her eyes looking upward to him, so near to her that he could count every breath that parted her soft warm lips, it was hard for him to keep stern and cold to her, repress the words that hung upon his lips, chain down the impulse that rose in him, with irresistible longing, to take her to his heart and carry her far away where no man could touch her, and no false laws deny him the love that was his common birthright among men.

“What a long time you have been away, Sir Folko!”

began Alma again. "Ten whole days! You have never been to see me since that beautiful ball. I thought you were sure to come the next day, or the day after, at latest. Have you been out of town?"

"Oh no!" said De Vigne, moving toward the house without looking at her.

"Then why have you been so long?"

"I have been engaged, and you have had plenty of other visitors," he answered, his jealousy of Vane Castleton working up into a bitterness he could not wholly conceal.

She colored. Looking aside at her, he saw the flush in her cheeks. She had never looked confused before at any words of his, and he put it down, not to his own abruptness, but to the memory of his rival.

"No visitors whom I care for," said Alma, with that pretty petulance which became her so well. "I have told you till I am tired of telling you that nobody makes up, or ever could make up, to me for your absence!"

How his heart glowed at her reply! But the devil of jealousy was not lulled so easily, wayward as he always had been from his cradle, and suspicious as his life now had made him.

"Still, when I am absent," he said, with that satire which with him was often a veil to very deep feeling, "you can console yourself very agreeably with other men."

They had now passed into her room. He leant against the side of the window, playing impatiently with sprays of the honey-suckle and clematis that hung round it, snapping the sprays and throwing the fragrant flowers recklessly on the grass outside the sill, careless of the ruin of beauty he was causing. She stood opposite to him, stroking the parrot's scarlet crest unconsciously—she and her bird making a brilliant picture.

His words touched her into something like his own

mingled anger and satire, for their natures had certain touches in common, as all natures have that assimilate and sympathize; and Alma's temper, though very sweet, could be passionate at provocation or injustice.

"If I thought so," she answered, quickly, "I should not honor the woman I suspected of such falsehood and such variability by any visits at all from me, were I you."

"Is that a hint to me to leave your new friend Castleton the monopoly?" asked De Vigne, between his teeth.

"Sir Folko!"

That was all she deigned to answer—her eyes flashing fire in their dark-blue depths, her cheeks hot as the crimson roses above her head, her expressive lips full of tremulous indignation, her attitude, all fire and grace and outraged pride, said the rest. There was fascination about her then sufficient to madden any man who loved her.

"Would you try to make me believe, then, that you do not know that man Castleton loves you—what he calls love, at least?" asked De Vigne, fiercely.

Alma's cheeks glowed to a warmer crimson still, and resentment at his tone flashed from under her black lashes, like azure lightning. He had put *her* passions up now.

"You must be mad to speak to me in that tone. I bear no imputation of a falsehood even from you. I do not suppose Lord Vane loves me, as you phrase it. From the little I know of him, I should fancy him infinitely too vain and too egotistical to love any woman whatsoever. That he flatters me, and would talk more foolish nonsense still, I know; but that is scarcely to my taste, as you, I should have thought, might have believed, and——"

"You will be very unwise if you give ear or weight to his 'foolish nonsense;' many a girl as young and as fair as you have been ruined by listening to it," interrupted De Vigne, without waiting for her explanation. He was so

mad that Vane Castleton should even have dreamt that he would win her; he was so rife with passions wild and reckless, that, rather than stand calmly by the girl, he must upbraid her; and the storm that was in his heart found vent in cruel and sarcastic words, being denied the softer and natural outlet of love, vows and fond caresses. The love that murdered Desdemona, and condemned Heloise to a living death, is not dead in the world yet. "Vane Castleton *can* love, not as you idealize it, perhaps, but as he holds it. There is no man so brutal, so heartless, or so egotistical, but can love—as he translates the word, at least—for his own private ends or selfish gratification. 'Love' is men's amusement, like horse-racing, or gaming, or drinking, and you would not find that 'bad men' abstain from it—rather the contrary, I am afraid! Vane Castleton will love you, I dare say, if you let him, very dearly—for a month or two!"

How bitterly he spoke, holding his hand upon his chest, and breathing hard, as he looked away from her out into the glad summer sunshine, lying so sweetly and brightly upon the turf and on the chestnut-boughs.

Alma gazed at him, her large eyes wide open, like a startled gazelle's, her cheeks crimson with the blush his manner and his subject awoke.

"Sir Folko, what has come to you? *Are* you mad?"

"Perhaps," said De Vigne, between his teeth—set, as he would set them in the wild work of a charge or a skirmish. "All I say is, that you are unwise to receive Castleton's visits and listen to his flattering compliments. Many women have rued them. I can tell you that men very unscrupulous in such affairs, the last to condemn, the first to give license and latitude, have called him Butcher, for his gross brutality—sleek and soft as he looks—to a girl no older than yourself, whose boy brother he shot dead through

the heart. You would have been wiser to have taken Curly's honest affection; there are few honest hearts upon earth, and *there* the world would have gone with you, society would have smiled on your love, and prudence and propriety and wisdom upheld you in your choice——"

"Sir Folko! What right have you to speak to me like this?" interrupted Alma, with a passionate gesture. "What right have you to suppose that I should listen to Vane Castleton, or any other man? If you had listened to me you would have heard that his fulsome compliments are detestable to me, and that I hate them and loathe them, that I told him so this very afternoon, and that I shall have strangely mistaken him if ever he repeats his visits here again. How could you, knowing me as you do, or as you ought to do, presume to doubt that I could find pleasure in flattery that I, at least, think no compliment? Still more, how could you dream that I, having seen you, could tolerate him, or any other man? Do you think that society and prudence weigh with me? Do you suppose that love I could not return would have any temptation for me, even where it is as true and generous as I believe Colonel Brandling's to be? Do you think that I could endure the iron bondage of marriage with a man for whom I cared nothing, however it might be gilded over with the glare of rank and riches and position? What harm have you heard of me to make you all at once class me with the women you satirize and ridicule? Would you wish to give me over to your friend? Would you think so meanly of me as to——Oh, Sir Folko, Heaven forgive you!"

She stood beside him passionate as a little Pythoness, with all the fervor of her moiety of Italian nature awoke and aroused; her cheeks crimson with her indignation, her grief, and her vehemence, her lips just parted with their rush of words, her head thrown back in defiance, her little



white hands clinched together, yet on her face a very anguish of pain, and in her large brilliant eyes inexpressible tenderness, reproach, and wistful agony. Her gaze was fixed upon him even while her heart heaved with the fresh and vehement burst of new emotions his words had aroused; and tears, passionate and bitter, rose in her throat and gathered in her eyes—those tears of blood, the tears of woman's love. All his passion surged up in De Vigne's heart with resistless force; all that burning love for her which had crept into his heart with such insidious stealth, and burst into such sudden flame but a few hours before, mastered and conquered him. In all her strange and brilliant fascination, in all her fond and childlike frankness, in all her newly-dawned and impassioned tenderness she stood before him; his heart throbbed wildly, the hot blood mounted to his pallid brow in the fierceness of the struggle, the olden delirium fastened on him with more intoxication than ever in days gone by, even in that for whose price he had paid down his name, his honor, and his freedom. Will, power, reason, self-control were shivered to the winds; he was no statue of clay, no sculptured god of stone, to resist such fierce temptation—to pass over and reject all for which nature, and manhood, and tenderness pleaded—to put away with unshaken hand the love for which every fiber of his being yearned.

She stood before him in all her witchery of womanhood, and before her De Vigne's strength bowed down and fell; the love within him wrestled with and overthrew him; every nerve of his nature thrilled and throbbed, every vein seemed turned to fire; he seized her in his arms where she stood, he crushed her slight form against his heart in an embrace long and close enough for a farewell, while he covered her flushed cheeks and soft warm lips with "lava kisses melting while they burned." He needed no words to tell he

was loved; between them now there was an eloquence compared to which all speech is dumb.

The glowing golden sunlight shone on them where they stood, two human beings formed for each other's joy. To those who condemn him, all I answer is, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!" God and nature had joined their hearts together in the higher bonds of love, enduring and eternal; it was man's meddling and pharisaic laws which dared to decree they should be put asunder.

Those moments of deep rapture passed uncounted by De Vigne, conscious only of that ecstasy of which he had been robbed so long, which was to his heart as the flowing of water-springs through a dry land; all the outer world was forgotten by him, all his unnatural and cruel ties faded from his memory, all he knew was that once more he was loved on this weary life—so weary without love; all he felt was the wild pulsations of the heart he held imprisoned against his own, whose throbs were all for him; all he remembered was that he loved and was loved! Holding her still in his arms he leaned against the side of the window, the soft summer wind fanning their brows, flushed with their mutual joy; his passion spending itself in broken sighs and deep delight, and hurried words and fond caresses.

"You love me, Alma?" he whispered eagerly, bending his haughty head to look into the eyes whose loving radiance answered him without words.

"Forever!" she murmured, as fervently, looking up into his face, while warm blushes tinged her cheeks and brow. "How could I help but love you in joy or in sorrow, in death or in life; you, the realization of all my best ideals; you, to whom I owe all the happiness of my being; you, who have haunted all my sweetest dreams ever since my earliest childhood? Love you? How could I choose but love you?"

She paused abruptly with a deep-drawn sigh of joy, awed at the depth and vehemence of her own love, looking up in his face with those eloquent guileless eyes, in which lay all the tenderness, ardent yet undefiled, which he had awakened in her pure but impassioned heart. How could he remember aught else when love like this was offered him; how could he think of anything save the heaven shrined for him in those fond words and loving eyes? He clasped her closer still against his breast, pressing his lips on hers with the passionate fire of his vehement nature.

"My God! if you love me like this, how do I love you! Would to Heaven I could reward you for it!"

Alma, who knew not his thoughts or his meaning, looked up with a smile, half shy, half mournful, yet inexpressibly beautiful, with its frank gladness and deep tenderness.

"Ah, what reward is there like your love?"

De Vigne kissed her lips to silence; he dare not listen to the eloquence that lured him in its unconscious innocence with such fierce temptation. For, now that the first moments of wild rapture had passed, the memory of his marriage, of his resolves, of his duty, shown him by a much younger, and in such matters equally latitudinarian a man, and acknowledged to himself, by reason and honor, justice and generosity, of his right to tell her fully and freely of the fetters that held him, and the hateful woman that Church and Law decreed to be, though heart and nature refused ever to acknowledge as, his wife; all these rushed on him, and stood between him and his new-won heaven, as we have seen the dark and spectral shadow-form of the Hartz Mountains rise up cold and grim between us and the sweet rose-hued dawn which is breaking over the hills and valleys, and chasing away with its golden glories the poisonous shades and shapes of night.

He had no power to end with his own hand this fresh and glorious existence which had opened before him. If he had ended with absinthe or with laudanum his own life, men would have prosed sermons over him, and printed his condemnation in glaring letters; yet, alas for charity or judgment! they would have condemned him equally because he shrank from this far worse and more cruel self-murder—the assassination of love, the suicide of the soul. By Heaven! men need be gods to conform to all the laws of men. We must love life so well, that when it is at its darkest, its loneliest, brimful with misery, bitter and poisonous as hemlock, we must never, in our cruelest hours of solitude, feel for an instant tempted to flee from its fret and anguish to the silent sleep of the tomb; yet—we must love it so little, that when it smiles the sweetest, when it is fair as the dawn and generous as the sunshine, when it has led us from the dark and pestilent gloom of a charnel-house back to a laughing and joyous earth, when it has turned our tears into smiles, our sorrow into joy, our solitude into a heaven of delight, *then* with an unhesitating hand we are to put aside the glorious cup of life, and turn away, without one backward glance from our loved Eden, into the land of darkness, of silence, and of tears. Alas! if God be as harsh to us as man is to his fellow-man! De Vigne's life, for the first time since long long years, was full of that delirious rapture for which his nature, knowing no medium between cold indifference or tropical passion, was formed, and for which his heart, so alien to the chill stoicism he had perforce tried to acquire, had longed and thirsted. In his extreme youth the love of women had been his chief temptation and his favorite plaything. It was very certain in his vigorous manhood, with all its ripened passions and intensified emotions, to become, when

once he yielded to it, his dearest delirium and sweetest ecstasy. Can you wonder that in its most delicious moments of first confession his courage failed him to shadow it with a cloud; much more to tell what might dash it forever from his lips; much more still to say sternly to the woman who worshipped him those bitterest of words spoken by human lips, "We must part?"

He was so happy! He could not choose but cast behind him the curse of his cruel ties. He was so happy! with that rapturous and tumultuous happiness born from the joy of a lingering caress, or the first vows of a newly-won love, that does not pause to count its treasures, or seek the springs of its delight, or ask how long its heaven will last, or by what right its heaven has been gained. It was a happiness, passionate, restless, vehement, like his natural character. He was not easy unless she was gathered in his arms, as if afraid that fate might tear her from him. He was never weary of making her repeat her fond assurances of the love she bore him. He was exigent in his love, and it was well that Alma's for him was so deep and warm that with her *mélange* of childlike frankness and woman's passion she responded fully to the bursts of intense tenderness which he lavished upon her—tenderness all the more intense for the uncertainty of its tenure, and the gloom which seemed to hang around it, as tempest-clouds hanging above the western sky at sunset make by force of contrast the rose-hued glow of golden rays still warmer and more brilliant.

All about and around them nature spoke of Love. The gorgeous and sultry day slumbered softly in the voluptuous summer air. The dark-green chestnut-boughs bent downward with the weight of their own beauty, while amid their white blossoms the thrush and goldfinch sang glad yet tremulous love-songs. The rich glow of the luxurious

summer-time lay on the earth in all its fragrant glory, while the scented limes, waving up to the deep azure sky above, and the crimson roses, their blushing petals still wet with the tears of ecstasy the clouds had shed when passing on forever from their loveliness, stirred in the low breeze, and filled the air with a dreamy luxuriance of odor.

All nature spoke of Love, yet of love more fully blest and less passionate than the mortal's who gazed upon it. Its beauty and its peace were at war with the fiery passions in his heart; its eternal calm irritated him, even while its voluptuous warmth and loveliness stole over his senses.

"How well do you love me, Alma?" he said, abruptly, as they sat beside the open bay-window, his arms still round her, her soft small hands held in his, her head, with its golden and perfumed hair, leaning against his breast, her eyes sometimes drooped under their long black lashes, more often raised to his with their fervent, trustful gaze, and on her face the flush of joy too deep to last.

"How well do I love you?" she repeated, with her old, arch, amused smile playing round her lips. "Tell me, first, how many petals there are in those roses, how many leaves on the chestnut-boughs, how many feathers in that butterfly's wings—then, perhaps, I may tell you how well I love you, Sir Folko!"

De Vigne could not but smile at the poetry and enthusiasm of the reply—so like Alma herself; but as he smiled he sighed impatiently.

"I am 'Sir Folko' no longer, Alma; the name was never appropriate. I have always told you I am no stainless knight. Call me Granville. I have no one to give me the old familiar name now."

"Granville!" murmured Alma, repeating the name to herself, with a deeper flush on her cheeks. "Granville! Yes, it is a beautiful name, and I love it because it is yours;

yet I love Sir Folko best, because others have called you Granville before me, but 'Sir Folko' is all my own!"

Her innocent speech stung him to the heart; he remembered how truth, and honor, and justice demanded of him to tell her *who* had "called him Granville before her."

"Still, if you like it best, it is everything to me," she went on responding to her own thoughts. "Granville! You will be that to me, and Major De Vigne to all the rest of the world, won't you? it makes me seem nearer to you; but I must call you Sir Folko sometimes."

She spoke so naturally—as if all their future would be spent together! He interrupted her almost hastily:

"But you have not answered my question. How much do you love me? Come, tell me!"

"How *can* I tell you?" she answered, looking up in his face with that smile so tender that it was almost mournful. "It seems to me that no one could ever have loved as I do you. My earliest memories are of you; every recollection is of some noble or generous act of yours; you realize my noblest ideals; you are twined into my every thought and wish; you fill my dreams by night and day; in spirit I am always with you, and without you my life is dark and dreary as a desert. How much do I love you? Oh! I will tell you when you number the rose-leaves or count the river waves, then, but not till then, could I ever gauge my love for you!"

He pressed her closer to him, yet he asked a cruel question:

"But if I left you now—if I were ordered on foreign service, for instance, and died in battle, could you not find fresh happiness without me?"

She clung to him, all her radiant joy banished, her face white and her eyes wild with a prescient dread:

"Oh! why do you torture me so? Such jests are cruel.

You know that you are the life of my life, and that no other man, even had you never cared for me, would ever have been anything to me. I do not tell you I would die for you, that is a hackneyed phrase not fit for deep and earnest love like ours, though, Heaven knows, existence would be no sacrifice if given up to serve you; but I would live for you—I *will* live for you as no woman ever lived for man. I will increase all talents God has given me that you may be prouder of me; I will try and root out all my faults, that you may love me better. If ever you lose your wealth, as rich men have done, I will work for you, and glory in my task. To share the pomp of others would be misery, to share your poverty, joy. I will pray to Heaven that I may always be beautiful in your eyes; but if you ever love another, do not tell me, but kill me, as Alarcos slew his wife: to lose my life would be sweeter than to lose your love. If war calls you, I will follow—death and danger would have no terror by your side—and if you died in battle, I would be truer to you, till we met beyond the grave, than woman ever was to any living love. But—my God! you *know* how well I love you; why do you torture me thus?"

She had spoken with all that impassioned fervor natural to her, but passion so intense treads close on anguish; all the soft bloom of youth and joy forsook her lips, and her head drooped upon her bosom, which heaved with uncontrollable sobs. Poor child! she had shed bitter tears in her short life, but these were the first of those waters of Marah which flow side by side with the hot springs of Passion. De Vigne pressed her with almost fierce tenderness to his heart, lifted her face to his, and called back the rose-hued light of life to her cheeks and brow with breathless caresses, as if he would repay with that mute eloquence the perfect love which touched him too deeply to answer it



in words. It struck far down into his heart, stirring all its long-sealed depths, this noble, generous, and high-souled love now felt for him. All its devotion and heroism; all its unselfishness, and warmth, and trust; all the diviner essence which breathed in it, marking it out from man's and woman's ordinary loves, brutal on the one side, exigent and egotistical on the other; all the high devotedness and impassioned fervor upon her speaking face, struck home to the better nature of De Vigne, and there came upon him a mortal anguish of regret that with this noble, frank, and tender heart he should give nothing but gain all; that it would be he who would ask sacrifices of her, not she who would receive at his hands the rank and honor and position which he would have delighted in showering on her, not for the world's sake, but as gages of his own love. To him, generous-hearted even to his foes, liberal where he was most indifferent, not to be able to recompense this perfect love with the only reward a man can give the woman dearest to him—to be compelled to ask one who trusted him so entirely and loved him so unselfishly to sacrifice herself for him, and live under a social ban for his sake, was pain bitter and inexpressible. Yet with it all was a delicious joy at finding himself so loved, a delirious rapture at the response so ardent, yet so delicate, which she gave to his own passion—how could he leave her now?—how could he, even without thought of himself, send her from his arms into the chill unloving world?—how could he consign her to the death in life which she had told him existence without him would be to her now? His heart was at once a very hell and heaven within him; passionate joy to be so loved, mingling passionate regret to be denied, by his own past folly, from rewarding such a love with the honor and the name it merited. In its struggling he lavished on her all the vehement fondness that a man ever

poured on the object of his idolatry; in those few hours she had grown unutterably dear to him, though, save a few murmured and feverish words, his passions were too strong to form themselves to speech. But one other question he put to her:

"Darling, if you love me like this, would you be content with me for your sole companion, away from the hum of men and the pleasures of society, alone in an Eden of the heart?"

She thought that he was doubting and trying her, and laughed a low joyous laugh, looking up in his face with an arch mischief, with something of her old *méchanceté*, hushed for a time into a deeper happiness.

"I shall not answer you. You are a great deal too exigent! Do you want me to flatter you any more?"

"No, but I wish you to tell me," answered De Vigne, with his impatient persistence, looking with his whole soul into her upraised eyes, and awing her childlike gayety with the depth and vehemence of his own fiery heart. "For me, with me, could you bear the world's sneer? With the warmth of love around you, would you care what the world said of you? Should I be sufficient for you if others look coldly and neglected you?"

Even now his literal meaning did not occur to her; she neither knew nor dreamt of any ties that bound him; and she still thought he was trying to see how little or how much she loved him.

"Why do you ask me?" she said, almost impatiently, her eyes growing dark and humid with her great love for him. "You know well enough that 'for you,' and 'with you,' are talismans all-powerful with me. Your smile is my sole joy, your coldness my sole sorrow. While you were with me the world's frowns would be nothing: if I were happy, what should I care how the chill winds blew

without, so as they touched not me and what I loved? You are all the world to me; in such a life *I* should not be the one to weary. Sir Folko—Granville, why *will* you doubt me?"

"I do *not* doubt you! It would be better for you if your love were less true, or mine more worthy of it. Oh Alma! Alma! would to God we had met earlier!"

But she did not hear his muttered words, nor see the hot tears that stood in his haughty and lustrous eyes: tears wrung from his very heart's depths; tears of gratitude, regret, remorse, and wholly of tenderness, as he bent over her, pressing his burning lips to her flushed brow and soft cheeks, warm with a feverish glow, the glow of joy, predestined not to last.

And now the sun was near his setting, and all the earth was brilliant with the imperial glories that attend the gorgeous burial of a summer day. Mingling rays of crimson and of glow stretched across the deep-blue sky, and steeping in light the snow-white fleecy clouds that rose up on the horizon, like the silvery mountain range of some far-off and Arcadian land. The roses glowed a deeper hue, the chestnut-boughs drooped nearer to the earth, intoxicated with their own beauty; the flowers hung their lovely heads, drunk with the nectar of the evening dew; the birds were gone to sweetest sleep, rocked by the warm west wind; the delicious odor from the closed flower-buds and perfumed lime-leaves filled the air with a still more exquisite odor, while already on the warm and radiant day descended the tender and voluptuous night.

The sunset hour, when the busy day still lingers on the earth, bowed down with the weight of sins and sorrows with which in one brief twelve hours the sons of men have laden her, and the night falls down with noiseless wing from heaven, to lay her soft hand on weary human eyes, and lead

them into dream-land, to rest awhile from toil and care, is ever full of Nature's deepest poetry. The working man at sunset leaves his plow and his hard toil for daily bread, and catches one glimpse of God's great mystery of beauty, as he sees the evening dew glisten in the dying eyes of the flowers his plow has slain. The Ave Maria at sunset wings its solemn chant over the woods and mountains, golden in God's own light, and mingles its human worship with the pure voiceless prayer of the fair earth. The soul of man at sunset shakes off the dust of the working world, and with its rest has time to listen to the sweeter under notes and more spiritual harmonies which lie under the rushing current of our outer life; and at sunset our hearts grow tenderer to those we hate, and more awake to all the silent beauty of existence which our strife, and fret, and follies mar and ruin; and—when we love—as the warm sunset fades, and the dreamy night draws on, all the poetry and passion that lie in us wake from their slumber, and our heart throbs with its subtle and voluptuous beauty.

The golden rays of the sun, while it still lingered over the lovely earth, as a lover loth to part, fell upon Alma's golden hair, and lit up her features with a strange radiance, touching the lips and cheeks into a richer glow, and darkening her eyes into a still deeper brilliance. De Vigne looked down upon her face as it rested against his breast, and she gazed up into his dark and brilliant eyes, in which a language so new and yet so natural was spoken to her. They were silent; they needed no words between them, a whisper now and then was all; their thoughts were better uttered by the caresses he lavished upon her, in the vehemence of his new-born love. The dangerous spell of the hour stole upon them; her soft arms were round his neck; his lips rested on her flushed brow; while one hand played with a thick silky lock of her golden hair which had escaped

from the rest and hung down to her waist, twisting it round his fingers and drawing it out, half in admiration of its beauty, half in absence of thought; while as the sun sank out of sight below the horizon, and the little crescent of the moon rose clearer in the evening ether, and the air grew sweeter with the more intense perfume of the early night, Alma might have known that the heart on which her young head rested was throbbing loudly with fiercer and more restless passion than the loving and tender joy which made *her* heart its own unclouded heaven.

And still he had not told her of his marriage: and still he said to himself, "I ought to leave her, but, God help us! *I cannot.*"

On their delicious solitude, alone with the beauty of nature and of love, the sound of a horse's hoofs broke, with the harsh clang and clamor of the outer world. All was so still around Alma's sequestered home, especially in the summer evenings, when the little animal life there was about the farm was hushed and at rest, that the unusual sound of human life brought, by its sudden inroad, the serpent of social life into the solitude of the heart, from which for awhile all memory of the prying and fretting world had been excluded.

The horse's gallop ceased at the little gate, and the wicket opened with a clash of its iron latch. De Vigne half started, with a vague dread that some one had come to try and rob him of his new-won treasure. The strongest nerves grow highly strung at times; when the poetry of life wakes in the hearts of men of action, and passion rises up out of their ordinarily calm existence, their whole souls stir with it, as the great seas that do not move for light showers or low winds arise at the sound of the tempest, till all nature is awed at their vehemence, and their own lowest depths tremble with the convulsion.

"What is the matter?" whispered Alma, as she saw his eyes straining eagerly to see who the new-comer was.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered, hastily. He could not tell her that the vague dread upon him (upon him! he who had laughed at every danger, and held his own against every foe) was the terror and the horror of that woman whom the Church and Law called his wife. He gave a deep sigh of relief as he saw that it was only his own groom, Warren, coming up the path with a note in his hand; but his eyebrows contracted, that instantaneous sign with him of irritation and annoyance, and the blood mounted to his forehead in anger at the interruption. With the contradictory waywardness of human nature, while he knew that he should never leave Alma unless some imperative call aided him to drag himself from her side, he could have found it in his heart to slay the man who would force him, however innocently, from his paradise.

The note was merely from Dunbar, major of Ours, to ask to see him at once, on business of urgent military importance; but as the envelope was marked outside "Immediate," François, his confidential servant, had sent a groom off with it as soon as he saw it.

De Vigne read the note in silence, only pointing to Alma the words on it, "Let me see you, if possible, early this evening," and sat still, tearing the paper into little pieces, with his teeth set, his face deadly pale, and a bitter struggle in his heart—a struggle more hard and cruel, even than to most men, to one who had followed all his impulses, whose will had been unbridled from his cradle, with whom to wish and to have had always been synonymous, and whose passions were as strong as renunciation was unaccustomed. With a fierce oath muttered in his teeth he sprang to his feet; half awed by the sternness on his face, the gray pallor of his cheek, and the flashing fire of his eyes, she took his

hands in her own with the caressing, girlish fondness of her usual manner.

"Must you go? Can't you give me one-half hour more? That gentleman does not care to see you as I care to keep you! The hours were always so long when you were away; what will they be now? Give me ten minutes more—just ten minutes! You must think of your little Alma before everybody now. No one cares for you as she does!"

Her loving, innocent words, the clinging touch of her little hands, the witchery of her face, lifted so trustingly and frankly up to his in the soft twilight shadows—what torture they were to him!

"Hush, hush!" he said, almost fiercely, crushing her in a passionate farewell embrace. "Do not ask me; for God's sake let me go while I can, Alma! Kiss me and forgive me, my worshiped darling, for all the sins in my past, and my acts and my thoughts, of which your guileless heart never dreams!"

She did not understand him; she had no clew to the wild thoughts rioting in his heart; but love taught her the sympathy experience alone could not have given; her kisses, warm and soft as the touch of rose-leaves, answered his prayer, and her words were fond as human words could be.

"Since I love you, how could I help but forgive you whatever there might be? No sin that you could tell me of would I visit upon you. I do not know what your words mean, but I do know how well I love you: too well to listen what others might ever say of you; too well to care what your past may have been. There is nothing but tenderness and faith between us; there never can be, there never shall be. Good night, my own dearest! God bless you!"

"God bless you!" murmured De Vigne, incoherently. "Let me go, let me go, Alma, while I have strength!"

In another moment the ring of his horse's hoofs rung loud on the stony road, growing fainter and fainter on the evening air, till it died away to silence; while Alma leaned out under the chestnut-boughs, looking up to the stars that were shining in the deep-blue sky, now that the golden sunset had faded, with tears of joy on her long black lashes and sighs of delight on her warm lips, dreaming her sweet love idyll, and thinking of the morrow that would bring him to her again.

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## PART THE NINETEENTH.

### I.

#### A BITTERNESS GREATER THAN DEATH.

As soon as De Vigne reached town he went home and smoked—he needed the sedative badly enough—scarcely tasted some soup of all the dainty dinner that awaited him, drank plenty of iced hock, and drove to Dunbar's, glad of anything to do that would prevent his needing to think. Dunbar, in a very few words, told him what he wanted of him, which was to exchange with him back into the Dashers, and go out to the Crimea in his stead; but in lieu of the eager assent he had anticipated from so inveterate a campaigner and thorough-bred a soldier, he was astonished to see De Vigne pause, hesitate, and wait irresolute.

"I thought you would like it, old fellow," said Dunbar. "The exchange would be easily effected. I should be no good in the Crimea; the winter season would send me to



glory in no time with my confounded bronchia, while you seemed to enjoy yourself so thoroughly out in India, polishing off those black devils, that I thought you'd be delighted to get a chance of active service again."

"I enjoy campaigning; no man more so," said De Vigne, shortly; "and to give up a chance of active service is almost as great a sacrifice to me as anything. At the same time, circumstances have arisen which make me doubt whether I can go in your stead or not. Will you give me twenty-four hours to decide?"

"Very well—if you like. I know you will tell me this time to-morrow that you have already ordered your cases of Bass, and looked over your new rifles. You will never be able to resist the combined seductions of Turkish liaisons and Russian spearing," laughed Dunbar.

De Vigne laughed too; though, Heaven knows, laughter was far enough from his heart:

"Very possibly. Sport has always been my favorite Omphale; and it's one that never makes us pay a price for indulging in its amours; we can't say quite so much for the beau sexe! I'll send you a line to-morrow evening, yes or no."

"Oh! it's sure to be yes," said Dunbar. "You were always the very deuce for war and women, but I think campaigning carried the day."

De Vigne laughed again, *par complaisance*; but he thought of one woman he had learnt to love more dearly than anything else in earth or heaven. He left Dunbar, went back to his house, and shut himself in his own room. He lit his cigar, opened the window, and leaned out into the sultry July night. His honor and his love were at war, and the calm and holy midnight irritated and inflamed, where at another time it might have soothed him. Never in all his life, with its errors, its vehemence, its faults, its

hot instincts, its generous impulses, its haughty honor, never stained by a mean thought, but often hazarded by reckless passions, had his nature been so fairly roused as now. He knew that he had fallen far from his standard of truth and candor in the concealment of his marriage, which had gone on from day to day till he had won the deepest love he had ever had, ostensibly a free man; and that knowledge cut him to the soul, and gave him the keenest remorse he had ever known; for though he did much that was wrong in haste, his conscience was ever tender, and nothing could ever blunt him to any dereliction from frankness and honesty. But he knew, too, now that the evil was done, and Alma's life, as she had told him, would be desolate without him, that to leave her now would be to quench all the youth and glory from her young days, and refuse her the sole consolation in his power to give her his love—no light consolation to a woman of her mind and nature.

He *could* not have broken from her now; to have left her unprotected, unportioned, friendless, to brave the blasts of the world with her high spirit and warm susceptibilities; to have bade her farewell for long and weary years, perhaps for life itself, never to meet again, never again to look into each other's eyes, and together breathe the free fresh air of the fair earth, so fair to those who love; never to pass another golden hour together, but to linger through all existence apart—apart in all the glorious light of life; apart till cold gray age crept on, and both were laid in the narrow chamber of the dead; apart even to the last, the lips that had vainly longed for sweet caresses, silent and fixed; the eyes that had vainly yearned for one sight of the loved face, closed and unconscious; the hearts that had throbbed with natural human love, stilled and powerless forever. To have lived thus apart from life onward into

death! He would have had no strength to do it; no courage to face so dreary and hopeless a future; no power to condemn her and himself to this gray and weary anguish of separation. To break from her now would have been to tear his very heart-strings from their core; all his soul revolted from the cruel and unnatural divorce, the divorce of human hearts created for each other's joy, formed to love and live in that gracious and golden earth which God gave to man, and man has marred so sadly for himself and for his fellows.

The Wife the law forced on him his nature, his honor, and his heart rejected and forswore; the wife the law denied him all alike pointed out and accepted, and to her he would have been faithful to the grave. All the manhood in him rebelled against the false and hideous marriage the world had fastened on him as just and valid; more cruel than the iron shackles on the dying limbs of the Neapolitan Pironti, more loathsome than the festering sting of the scorpion or the murderous and relentless bite of the vampire. The world's decree had fastened the shackles upon him, even though with every link of the fetters the iron entered into his soul as when the chains were fastened upon the quivering bodies in the Galera Politica of our own day. On the world he would revenge himself, and if social law had withered half his life social opinion should not have power to despoil the rest.

"God help her," he muttered to himself, as he looked down into the dark and silent street; "I will be truer to her than any husband ever was to any wife. She is my wife by love, by reason, by right, and when others sneer at her or pass her coldly by because she has sacrificed herself for me, I will atone to her for all—I will give up the world, and live for her alone. Since I have crushed my little flower in my headlong path, I will make up to her by

guarding her from all blight or storm. Would to Heaven I were worthy of her!"

Before he slept that night (and his slumber came not without an anodyne) his resolve was made. To-morrow he would tell her of his marriage—tell her all. If she still loved him, and still wished to live for him, passionately as his heart was bound to the Service, he would throw up his commission and take her to Italy or the Ionian Isles, where he would lavish on her all the luxuries and pleasures wealth could bring, and give her all he knew her heart craved, and what would be all-sufficient to her affectionate and unselfish nature—love. He would live for her alone; if, in time, he missed the glare and excitement of his past life with men, this sacrifice, in return, he at the least owed her; he would not bring her to the din of cities where coarse glances might pain the heart that had as yet known no shame, and where coarse judges would class her with the base Floras and Leilas of her sex. He would give her the life of beauty her vivid imagination would paint and thirst for, and for himself—De Vigne, so long alone in the world, so long chilled against his nature by adverse chances, would have paid down any price to win the luxury of love, pure, devoted, single-hearted, unstained by a single coarse instinct and unselfish impulse—love such as he knew Alma Tressillian bore for him.

Military duties kept him until late the next day. A soldier's life is not all play, though the foes to a standing army are given to making it out so. Several things called his attention that morning, and he had afterward to attend the first sitting of a court-martial on one of those low practical jokes with which raw boys bringing their public school vulgarities with them stigmatize a Service that enrolls the best gentlemen, the highest courage, and the most

finished chivalry of Europe, whose enemies delightedly pounce on the exception to uphold it as the rule.

The court-martial was not over till between two and three; De Vigne then hastily got unharnessed and into mufti, drank some soda-water—luncheon he very rarely took—lighted a cheroot, and threw himself across his horse. When he had once determined on a thing he never looked back; sometimes it had been better for him if he had. Yet, in the long run, I have known more mischief done by indecision of character than anything else in the world, and he is safe to be the strongest and stoutest-hearted who never looks back, whether he has determined on quitting Sodom or staying in it. The evil lies in hasty judgment, not in prompt action.

Right or wrong, however, he never *had* looked back, and nothing would ever have taught him to do it. His mind was made up—if Alma still loved him on hearing all, to take her to some southern solitude, and give up his life to her; if she reproached and condemned him, to take Dunbar's place, and fight in the Crimea till he fell—and nothing would have stirred either of his resolves. In all his life he had never turned back from any path where his vehement impulse led him; he was not likely to swerve or falter in this, on whose goal his heart was so utterly and entirely set, and to which an attachment stronger and infinitely deeper than even he had ever known lured him to the life for which, in his wild youth, he had not cared, but for which irresistible longings had broken up from the hot well-springs that lay ice-bound, but never dead, under the chill stoicism that covered his passionate manhood. He rode at a gallop from London to Richmond—rode to the fevered thoughts that chased each other through his mind, many of them of bitter pain and sharp stinging regret, for to the man of honor it was no light trial to say to the

woman who had trusted him, "I have deceived you!"—some of them of an involuntary self-reproach at the memory of how little he had merited and fulfilled the trust Boughton Tressillian had placed in him "as a man who will not misjudge my motives nor wrong my confidence." Yet all fears were crossed, and all remorse silenced, and outweighed by that wild delirium of joy of which his nature was capable—that fiery glow and triumph with which his great love could not but excel in the love it had won back in return, and the happiness she had wrested from life which had tried so hard to conquer him, and condemn him in the full vigor of youth and manhood to a cruel bondage and a chill and joyless solitude—a solitude that was not even freedom!

All more gloomy memories vanished, as shadows slink away before the sultry beauty of the noon, as he came within sight of Alma's home; his pulses glowed with all the fire of his earliest boyhood, his heart throbbed quicker, as he thought of her fond welcome. He pulled up his horse with such abruptness that the beast reared and fell back on his haunches; he threw himself off the saddle with a headlong impetuosity that might have lost him life or limb, flung the bridle over the post, and entered. The morning was gray and wet—strange contrast to the radiant summer the night before—the birds were silent, the flowers were snapped off their stems, their scattered petals lying stained and trodden on the moist gravel; his hurried steps stamped the discolored rose-leaves into the earth, and the dripping chestnut-boughs shook raindrops on him as he passed.

He brushed past the dank bushes in haste, careless, indeed unconscious, of the rain that fell upon him, his mind and heart full of the bitter history he had to tell, and of the love which had stirred every fiber of his warm and

deep, though long silent, affections, now fastened on Alma with a strength far surpassing the passion, vehement, it is true, but wayward and fickle, with which other women had inspired him. With all the impatience of his nature he glanced up at the house as he approached. He expected to find her looking out for him, to see her eyes fixed wistfully upon the gate, and to watch the radiance of joy dawn upon her face as she beheld him. He wanted to see that her thoughts and moments were consecrated to him in his absence as well as his presence, and to have in her joyous welcome and her rapid bound to meet him, surer evidence still of her love. He had no doubt of her; he knew that Alma was too fond to weigh the world against him, to balance love with prudence, and cloak egotism in the guise of affronted virtue. He had no fear but that she would link her life to his in the union for which nature pleaded, and which was their manhood's and their womanhood's right. Still, not to see her there struck a deadly chill into his heart; it was his first disappointment in her—a disappointment that was almost a prophecy.

With a strange, disproportionate anxiety he brushed past the dripping chestnut-boughs, ran up the steps of her bay-window, pushed open the glass door, and entered. There were her easel, her flowers, her little terrier, Pauline upon her stand pluming her feathers and congratulating herself on her own beauty, one of his own books, "Notre Dame," open on her low chair, with some moss-roses flung down in a hurry on its leaves; her colors, and brushes, and half-finished sketches scattered over the room—but the little mistress and queen of it all was absent. There was no sweet welcome for him, no loving, radiant face uplifted to his, no rapid musical voice to whisper in his ear earnest, impassioned words, no soft caresses to linger on his lips, no *warm young heart* to beat against his own.

He glanced hastily round on the still deserted chamber, then opened the door, and called her by her name. The house was low and not large, and he knew she would come at the sound of his voice as a spaniel at its master's call. There was no reply; the building was silent as death, and his heart beat thickly with a vague and startled dread. He went on the staircase and repeated her name; still there was no reply. Had she been anywhere in the house, small as it was, he knew she would have heard and answered him. A horrible unexplained fear fastened upon him, and he turned into a small old-fashioned bed-chamber, the door of which stood open, for in its farther window he caught sight of the old woman, her nurse, alone, but sitting in her wicker-chair, her head covered with her apron, rocking herself to and fro in the silent and querulous grief of age.

It is no metaphor that his heart stood still as he beheld her grief, which, mute as it was, spoke to him in a hundred hideous suggestions. She started up as his step rang on the bare floor, and wrung her hands, the tears falling down her wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, sir! oh, sir! my poor young lady—my pretty darling——"

His hand clinched on her arm like an iron vice.

"My God! what has happened?"

"That ever I should live to see the day," moaned the old woman. "That ever I couldn't have died afore it. My pretty dear—my sweet little lady that I nursed on my knee when she was a little laughing——"

His grasp crushed on to her wrist, while his words broke from him inarticulate and broken in his dire agony.

"Answer me—what is it? Where is she? Speak—do you hear?"



The woman heard him, and waved to and fro in the garrulous grief of her years.

"Yes, sir—yes; but I am half crazed. She's gone—my poor dear darling!"

"Gone—*dead*?"

The hue of death itself spread over his face. He let go his hold upon her arm and staggered backward, all life seeming to cease in the mortal terror of suspense and dread.

"No, sir—no, thank Heaven!" murmured the woman, blind to the agony before her in her own half-fretful sorrow. "Not dead, the pretty dear, though some, I dare say, would sooner see her in her coffin, and sure she might be happier in her grave, than she'll be now, poor child!"

The blood rushed back to his brain and heart; his strong nerves trembled, and he shook in every limb in the anguished agitation of that brief moment which seemed to him a ceaseless eternity of torture. If not dead she could not be lost to him; no human hand had power to take her from his arms.

All his fiery passion, which never brooked opposition or delay, awoke again. He seized the garrulous woman in a grasp whose fervency terrified her:

"Where is she, then? Speak—in a word—without that senseless babble."

"Yes, sir, yes," sobbed the old nurse, half lost in her quavering sorrow, but terrified at his manner and his tone. "She's gone away, sir, with that soft, lying, purring villain—oh, Lord! oh, Lord! what is his name?—that false, silky, girl-faced lord—a duke's son they said he was—who was always hankering after her, and coming to buy pictures, and cared no more for pictures than that cat. She's gone *off with him*, sir—that dear, innocent child, that a bad man

could trap into anything. Thank God! her poor grandfather died before it; it would have broke his heart almost; his pretty darling, that he'd have thought too good for a king on his throne. And it's all my fault. I should have told her what bad men will be—but she was always such a proud little lady, I never thought of saying a word to her, or daring to tell her what she oughtn't to do. And now she's gone away with him, the lying, silky villain, and he'll no more marry her than he'll marry me; and he'll leave her to starve in some foreign land, most likely, and I shall never see her little bright face again. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! sir, you men have much to answer for——”

“She is gone!—with him!”

If she had not been so wrapped in her own rambling regrets she must have noticed the terrible, unutterable anguish in his hoarse and broken words as he grasped her arm with almost wild, unconscious ferocity of madness:

“Woman, it is a vile plot—a lie. She has been trapped, deceived. She has not gone of her own will!”

“Yes, sir, she is—she's gone of her own mind, her own choice,” moaned the old nurse.

“I tell you she did *not*—it is a lie,” swore De Vigne. “He has stolen her, tricked her, fooled her away. It is a lie, I tell you, and you have been bribed to forge it. He has decoyed her away, and employed you for his accomplice, to pass this varnished tale on me. My God! if you do not acknowledge the truth I will find a way to make you!”

Terrified at his violence the old woman shook with fear, tears falling down her pale and withered cheeks:

“I tell you truth, sir—before Heaven I do. Do you think I should injure her, my pretty little lady, that I've loved like my own child ever since my poor master brought her from foreign lands, a little lisping, gold-haired thing?

Do you think I should join in a plot against her, when I've loved her all her life? Don't you think, sir, I'd be the first to screen her and the last to blame her? I tell you truth, sir, and it breaks my heart in the telling. She went of her own free will, and nothing could stop her. She must have planned it all with him yesterday when he was here; the oily, cruel villain! I knew he didn't come after them pictures; but I never thought Miss Alma would have come to *this*. She went of her own will, sir—she did, indeed! Lord Vane's carriage—his broom, I think they call it—came here between twelve and one this morning; not him in it, but his valet, and he asked straight for Miss Tressilian, and said he had a message for her, and went in to give it. I thought nothing of it—so many people have been coming and going lately for the pictures; and indeed, sir, I thought he was your servant, for the man looked like one you used to send here, till my boy, Tom, come in, and said he'd asked the coachman, and the coachman told him his master was the Duke of Tiara's son, and lived in the Albany, I think he called it, whatever that may be. The man wasn't there long before I heard Miss Alma run up stairs, and as I went across the passage I see her coming down them, with her little black hat on, and a cloak over her muslin dress; and a queer dread come over me, as it were, for I see her face was flushed, and she'd tears in her eyes, and a wild, excited look; and I asked her where she was going. But she didn't seem to hear me; and she brushed past me to where the man was standing. 'I am ready,' she says to him, very excited like; and then I caught hold of her—I couldn't help it, sir—and I said, though I didn't know where or why she was going, 'Don't go, Miss Alma—don't go, my darling.' But she turned her face to me, with her sweet smile—you know her pretty, imperious, impatient ways—'I must, nurse!' and I got hold

of her, and kept on saying, 'Don't go, Miss Alma! don't!—tell me *where* you're going, at least—do!—my dear little lady!' But you know, sir, if she's set her heart on a thing, it ain't never easy to set her against it; and there was tears in her eyes. She broke away with that willfulness she's had ever since she was a little child: 'I cannot stop, nurse—let me go!' and she broke away, as I said, and went down the garden path, sir, the man following after her, and she entered Lord Vane's carriage, and he got up in front, and they drove away, sir, down the road; and that's the last I ever see of my poor master's darling, Heaven bless her! and she'll be led into sorrow, and ruin, and shame, and she'll think it's all for love, poor child; and he'll break her heart and her high proud spirit, and then he'll leave her to beg for her bread; for that bird's better notions of work than she; and a deal fit she is to cope with the world, that's so cold and cruel to them that go against it!" \* \* \* \* \*

But long ere she ceased her garrulous grief, heedless of his presence or his absence in her absorbed sorrow for her lost darling, De Vigne had staggered from the chamber, literally blinded and stunned by the blow he had received. A sick and deadly faintness as after a vital wound stole over him, every shadow of color faded from his face as on his marriage-day, leaving it a gray and ashy hue even to his very lips; his brain was dizzy with a fiery weight that seemed to press upon it; he felt his way, as if it were dark, into an adjoining room, and sank down upon its single sofa, all the strength of his vigorous manhood broken and cast down by his great agony. How great that agony was Heaven only knew.

He threw back, as a hideous nightmare, the thought that Alma could be false to him; that a girl so young, so frank, so fond, could be so arch an actress; that all those

loving words, those sweet caresses, that earnest and impassioned affection lavished on him but a few short hours before, were all a lie. Yet the curse of evidence chimed strangely in; he recalled her blush at his mention of Castleton's name; he remembered that his ex-valet, Raymond, had entered Castleton's service on being discharged from his; the mere circumstance of her having left with any one, for anywhere, without an explanation, a word, or a message to him—her lover, whom she had parted with so passionately the night before—these alone wrote out her condemnation, and shattered all hope before his eyes.

What it was to him with all his fiery passions, and deep, silent heart, so fixed and centered on this girl, to find her false, to lose the strongest love of all his life, to know the woman he coveted with the ardent avarice of jealous worship won by another, the joys he thirsted for given to a rival he hated with all the bitter hate of a man for the spoiler who has robbed him of his single treasure—human words, so weak even at the strongest to picture human woe, could never tell. He had had fierce wrongs, fiery hate, and deep, silent sorrows in his life, but none had been like this: the death-blow to all there was of youth, of faith, of beauty, and of glory in his life. Sudden and passionate as had been his dream of love was his terrible awakening. Every nerve seemed to ache with the dull and dreary anguish, every vein seemed on fire with the fell torture of jealousy, his brain grew dizzy trying to realize the hideous and incredible truth, he sat like a man paralyzed with a violent and vital blow. He had come full of such a radiant and impassioned future, and an agony worse than his wildest imaginations could have ever dreaded had met him on the threshold.

He sat there in as mortal anguish as man ever knew. If wrong there had been in his acts and his thoughts it

was fearfully and cruelly avenged, and the punishment far outweighed the sin. Across the midnight darkness of his mind gleamed lightning flashes of fiery thoughts. Once he started to his feet—in the delirium of jealousy he swore to find Castleton wherever he had hid, and make him yield her up, or fight for her till one or the other fell. But pride was not all dead in him—nor ever would be while he had life. Since she had gone to another, let another keep her!

He sat there, all hue of life blanched from his face, his hands clinched, his teeth set tightly as in lock-jaw; the very suddenness of the blow had struck him with something of the blind, dizzy unconsciousness of physical and mortal pain. Once he arose, and sought half unconsciously, and with something of the dreamy instinct of a man paralyzed by a blow struck at him in the dark, for some note, some sign, some token that might explain her flight, or show at least that she had remembered him whom she had betrayed. He found none, and he sank back on the little couch with a moan of weary anguish, and a bitter curse on the sex that had twice betrayed him.

And now it was that the great faults of De Vigne's nature—hasty doubt, and passionate judgment—came out and rose up against him, marring his life once more. That quick skepticism which one betrayal had engrafted on a nature naturally trusting and unsuspecting, never permitted him to pause, to weigh, to reflect; with the rapidity of vehement and jealous passion, from devoted faith in the woman he loved, he turned to hideous disbelief in her, and classed her recklessly and madly with the vilest and the falsest of her sex. Of no avail the thousand memories of Alma's childlike purity and truth which one moment's thought would have summoned up in her defense, of no avail the fond and noble words spoken to him but the day before, which one moment's recollection would have

brought to his mind to vouch for her innocence, and set before him in its vile treachery the plot to which she had fallen victim,—of no avail! Passionate in every impulse, hasty in every judgment, too cruelly stung to remember in his madness any reason or any justice, he seized the very poison that was his death-draught, and grasped a lie as truth.

How long he sat there he never knew; time was a long blank to him; roll on as it might, it could only serve him in so far as it brought him nearer to his grave. His brain was on fire, his thoughts lost in one sharp, stinging agony that had entered into his life never to quit it. Thought, memory, hope, were all merged in one fierce, unutterable anguish, where hate, and love, and a very delirium of jealousy seemed to goad him on to madness. He sat there, that one dread fiery weight upon him like molten iron pressing on his brain, till her little dog, that had followed him up the stairs, and now crouched near him, awed as animals always are at the sight of human suffering, crept up and licked his hand, uttering a long, low whine as if mourning for her lost to them both. The touch roused him: how often in happier days, before the curse of love rose up between them, had he smiled to see her playing like a child with her little terrier! The touch roused him, calling him back to the life charged with such unutterable woe for him. He lifted his head and looked around; the clouds had rolled away, and the evening sun, bursting out in all its glory, shone with cruel mockery into the little chamber which, as it chanced, was Alma's apartment. The lattice windows were open, and the roses and clematis looked in with their bright eyes, while the summer wind swept over them with a fresh glad fragrance, stirring the open leaves of a book that lay where she had left it on the dressing-table, and stirring the muslin curtains of the little

white bed where night after night her radiant blue eyes had closed in sleep, as pure and sweet as a harebell folding itself to slumber. As he lifted his eyes and looked around the little chamber, so fell his glance upon his own portrait, which hung against the wall with the sunlight streaming full upon it—the portrait which she had drawn from childish memory of her friend “Sir Folko.” The sight of the picture told him that it was her room into which he had staggered in his unconscious suffering, and recalled to him the early days when she had first shown him that portrait, lavishing on him her innocent gratitude, her playful tenderness; the early days when their intercourse had been shadowless, and the curse of love had not entered their lives and risen up between them. As he gazed around him at all the trifles that spoke to him like living things of the woman he had loved and lost, the bitter agony in his soul seemed greater than he could bear; the fierce tension of his strained nerves gave way; with one cry to Heaven in his mortal anguish, he fell like a drunken man across the little couch, his brow resting on the pillow where her golden head had so often lain in childlike sleep, deep sobs heaving his breast, burning tears forcing themselves from his eyes, tears which seemed to wring his very life-blood from him in their fiery rain, yet tears which saved him in that horrible hour from madness.

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That night he wrote thus briefly to the Major:

“DEAR DUNBAR,—I desire to exchange with you if it can be effected. There is no time to be lost.

“Yours sincerely,

“GRANVILLE DE VIGNE.”



## II.

## HOW WE RODE IN THE LIGHT CAVALRY CHARGE.

ALADYN and DEVNO!—those green stretching meadows, those rich dense forests, catching the golden glow of the sunshine of the East—those sloping hill-sides, with the clematis, and acacia, and wild vine clinging to them, and the laughing waters of lake and stream sleeping at their base—who could believe that horrible pestilential vapors stole up from them, like a murderer in the dark, and breathing fever, ague, and dysentery into the tents of a slumbering army, stabbed the sleepers while they lay, unconscious of the assassin's hand that was draining away their life and strength? Yet at the very names of Aladyn and Devno rise to memory days of futile longing and weary inaction, of negligence inconceivable and ennui unutterable, of life spent for the lack of simplest common sense, and graves filled by a school-boy greed for fruit—such fruit as in such a land was poison when backed by a mad draught of raki. Days when, forbidden to seek another foe, Englishmen and Frenchmen went down powerless and spiritless before the cholera, which had its deadly grip upon them ere they heard its stealthy step. Days, when you could not stroll on the beach without finding at your feet a corpse hastily thrust into the loosened sand, for dogs to gnaw and vultures to make their meal, or look across the harbor without seeing some dead body floating, upright and horrible, in the face of the summer sun. Days, when pestilence was abroad through the encampment from Monastir to Varna, and the stately Guards, the flower of England, the men fresh from the easy, lounging life of London and Windsor, these soldiers “qui marchent comme les

Dieux," were so worn out by exhaustion, disease, and the deadly Bulgarian air, that they had barely strength left to march from Aladyn to Varna. Not the place for men to dwindle away their days who had a campaign, and a tough siege, and a bitter winter before them; still less the place for men to come to whose hearts were broken, and whose lives were dark and hopeless. Action and excitement are opiates and panaceas to the deadliest sorrow; inaction eats into the gayest heart, and depresses the lightest spirits, and men who will bear to die in the greatest torture without a murmur or a tremor in their voice, will sicken, and pine, and grow depressed and dispirited, when waiting and waiting, as the English and French forces waited on the pestilential shores of Bulgaria.

Yet we went out to the Crimea light-heartedly and cheerfully enough, God knows. We, tired of our easy life at home, lounging in clubs, pacing in the Ring, and flirting in Belgravian salons, were glad of a chance of that real campaigning of which almost all of us were ignorant, knowing no heavier fatigue than a Hyde Park field-day or a Woolwich sham fight; and the men took it calmly and cheerily, from the gravest lance-corporal to the youngest lad who captivated maid-servants with his dainty stable-dress. Ours were as fine a set of fellows as England ever sent away from her barracks, and though people tell us that our Service is apt to make much of small grievances, (an accusation I think they can hardly make against us when great ones fall in to our share,) the men bore the discomforts of shipboard, cramped and cooped up, pitching and tossing over the Bay of Biscay, with nothing to do but to puff at their pipes, and look at the seagulls, and suffer the miseries of the mal de mer with as much pluck and patience as could be expected from any Britons.

Women wept sorely the day our transport got under

weigh; they would have wept more bitterly still if they had foreseen the pestilence of Bulgaria, the shelterless landing of the 14th of September, the heaps of gay uniforms and stiffening corpses thrust pêle-mêle into a hastily dug pit; the long nights in the trenches, where men fell and none marked their fall; the winter days, when, more miserable than the poorest beggar crouching in a gutter at home, Englishmen were bidden to fight, but only left to endure, and not a soul in England seemed to care whether they lived or died.

We went out to the Crimea delightedly enough; most of us had a sort of indistinct panorama of skirmishes and excitement, of breathless charges and handsome Turkish women, of dangers, difficulties, and good tough struggles, pleasant as sport but higher spiced; of a dashing, brilliant campaign, where we should taste real life and give hard hits, and win perhaps some honor, and where we should say, "Si l'on meurt, eh bien, tant pis!" in the gay words of the merry French bivouac-song. We thought of what our governors or grandsires had done in the Peninsula, and longed to do the same—we did not guess that as different as the bundles of linen, with wrinkled, hideous features, that the Tartars called women, were to the lovely prisoners from the convents of flaming Badajoz, would be the weary, dreary, protracted waiting while the batteries strove to beat in the walls of Sebastopol, to the brilliant and rapid assault by which Ciudad Rodrigo was won! I do not like to write of the Crimea; so many painful memories come up with its very name—memories such as all who were out there must have by the score: of true friends slaughtered by negligence and lack of knowledge; of noble fellows lost through the red-tapeism of regulation, that kept its bales of drugs miles away from those that wanted *them*, and would not give up necessities to save the soldiers

from dying off one after another, like bees in a smoked hive, without "an order." Of the army that landed in Gallipoli, how many in six months' time had fallen in the field, and how many had died of cholera, of dysentery, of pestilence, caught among the deadly forests of Bulgaria, or brought on by the exposure of the night of their first bivouac; of cold, and fevers, and agues, from that piercing wind from which they were given no protection; from that deadly frost, before which mules, and horses, and men went down, while the soldiers in the trenches were dropping off for simple lack of any clothing warmer than rags an English pauper would reject, and the Household Troops were shoeless in the snow! A devil within me always rises up when I think of it—of the white gravestones on Cathcart's Hill, and the rough burial-places of those whom sickness and privation slew when they had come untouched from under the very batteries of the enemy; of Lacy Yea's face, as it lay swollen and almost undistinguishable on the slopes of the Redan; of Louis Nolan's last shriek; of our men, with the bones of their frost-bitten hands laid bare; of the soldiers, who would have fought to the last gasp with delight, yet were forced to be, as they termed it, with the iron in their souls, — "*poor, broken-down, old commissariat mules*;" of the young boys, delicately nurtured, and fresh from every luxury and comfort in their homes, where to wish was to have, and life was one bright summer day, toiling along in the blinding snow that cavalry horses refused to face, with their clothes hanging about them in miserable tatters, helping their men to tramp the weary five miles between the camp and the commissariat stores, with a cask of rum or biscuit; bearing negligence, privation, storm, and misery, animatedly, cheerily, laughing and comforting their men, even while their own young lives were slowly ebbing away with a sickness unto death;

—when I think of all I saw and heard, of all I know was done and suffered there, a devil rises in me that nothing can exorcise. Nothing personal prompts my anger; I liked the campaign well enough myself, having one of the very few tents that stood the hurricane, not missing more than nine-tenths of my letters, enjoying the exceptional blessing of something like a warm coat, and being now and then the happy recipient of a turkey, or some coffee that was *not* ground beans.

I was rewarded as much as any man could expect to be. I have a medal (shared in common with Baltic sailors who never saw the foe, save when securely anchored off Cronstadt) and three clasps, like the privates of the Line, though I am not aware that any infantry man was present at the Balaklava charge. When I came home I was received in a highly enthusiastic manner by the tenantry at Longholme, who, having an eye to the non-raising of their rents, would have cheered the son of the lord of their manor till their throats were hoarse, though he had been as great a brute as the Muscovites who bayoneted our wounded on the field. No; I am perfectly content myself, being happily able to buy my own majority, and being, therefore, independent of that very precarious thing “promotion for distinguished services.” But when I think of them all—my dead friends, men so gallant-hearted, men of such high mettle and courage, who went out so cheerily to danger, and wooed death as others woo their brides, and bore with every privation, only thinking of their “poor men,” whose deprivations cut nearer to them than their own, and who laid down their lives cheerfully and unrepiningly, though to many of them life was very sweet and very precious, dying of thirst and gunshot wounds on the dark battle-field, or of typhus fever or cholera among the *dreary and crowded* hospitals,—when I think of them all,

whose bodies lie thick where the sweet wild lavender is blowing over the barren steppes of the Chersonese this summer's day, I remember, wrathfully, how civilians, by their own warm hearths, sat and dictated measures by which whole regiments starving with cold, sickened and died; and how Indian officers, used to the luxurious style of Eastern warfare and travel, asserted those privations to be "nothing," which they were not called to bear; and I fear—I fear—that England may one day live to want such sons of hers as she let suffer and rot on the barren plains of the Crimea, in such misery as she would shudder to entail on a pauper or a convict.

What a night that was the British army spent on September 14! Few of us will ever forget our first bivouac on the Chersonese soil. That pitiless drenching down-pour of sheets of ink-black water, soaking through and through every blanket or great-coat that we, without a tent over any one of our heads in that furious storm, could offer to oppose to its violence—what a night it was! his first taste of campaigning was rough enough to many a poor fellow. Old generals accustomed to easy fauteuils, pleasant mornings in club-windows, slow canters on park-hacks, and lengthened dinners, products of a cordon bleu, were glad of the shelter of a bit of water-proof wrapper, and envying the Duke and Sir George Brown their tilted cart. Young lords and honorables, with the down hardly on their cheeks, fresh from every luxury and pleasure, accustomed to get up at noon after their chocolate and French novel, to be dressed by their valet with finest linen and most delicious bouquet, were lying down with reeking pools for their beds, in the pelting, ceaseless storm of rain that poured all night on their defenseless heads from the inhospitable clouds of the Crimea. What a night it was! De Vigne, ever reckless of *weather*, had not even a blanket to wrap

round him, and lay there in the puddles of which the morass-like earth was full, the rain pouring down upon him, the sole man in that army of twenty thousand odd who did not vent his discomfort in groans or oaths; perhaps there was so great a tempest warring in his heart that all exterior miseries passed unnoticed. And Sabretasche, the refined, luxurious man of fashion, accustomed to an excess of luxury even in an age when luxury is at its height, who loved to surround himself with every delicacy and every pleasure that could lull the senses and shut out the harsher world, on whose ear, and eyes, and taste anything bizarre, painful, or unsightly jarred so unspeakably, and who had been used from his birth to the most voluptuous and raffiné life, passed the night in a storm to which we should not expose a dog, and in discomfort for which we should pity a beggar; yet gave away the only shelter he had, a Highland plaid, to a young boy who had but lately joined, a little fellow with a face as fair as a girl's, and who had barely seen seventeen summers, who was shivering and shuddering with incipient ague.

The stamp of their bitter fate was upon both those men; the wounds were too deadly and too recent to be yet skinned over; healed they deemed they never would be, while their hearts beat and pulses throbbed. How Violet and Sabretasche parted Heaven only knew; no human eyes had pried in upon them in that darkest hour; they had parted on the very day that should have been their marriage-day; and of all the bitter farewells that were spoken that year, when so many of the best beloved of women left England—left, never to behold it or them again—none was like unto theirs, when their lips met in kisses such as the living give the dead ere the tomb shuts them forever from their sight. They had parted—whether ever *to meet again* on earth who could tell? They had parted

—the lives that should have blent in one were torn asunder. He left her, and came among us—calm, gentle, kind to those about him—thoughtful of the comforts and the needs of his men and his horses; but his brilliant and subtle wit was silent; the melancholy which had tinged his character, even in his happiest hours, had closed wearily and hopelessly around him. His trial was known to all; even the men who had admired Violet's fair face when she had driven up to the barracks, or come to a luncheon in the mess-room, had caught some version and some glimmering of it, and there was not one among the Dashers who did not, in his own way, grieve for and reverence the Colonel's sorrow, for not Strangways, nor Yea, nor Eman, nor Trowbridge, were ever better loved by their men than Vivian Sabretasche was by his.

De Vigne was even yet more altered, and I, who knew nothing of the cause, saw with astonishment all the icy coldness and the chilling hardness which had grown on him after his fatal marriage, but which had of late been utterly dissipated, now closing round him again in tenfold gloom and impenetrability. I could but guess at the cause, when, before the embarkation, I, knowing nothing of his passion for Alma, had asked him if he had been to bid her good-by, and wondered what the poor little thing would do without her beloved Sir Folko;—he turned on to me, his face white as death, his eyes black as night:

“Never breathe that name to me again!”

I knew him too well to press questions upon him, and unspeakably as I wondered at this abrupt snap of a friendship which I had always thought would lead to something dearer between a man of his age and a girl of hers, I was obliged to be content with my suspicions as to the solution, in which I did not much doubt the passion that De Vigne had so contemptuously defied had been at work.



But, knowing him as I did, I was pained to see the bitter gloom which had gathered round him again, too deeply for trouble, danger, excitement, or care of comment, to have any power to dissipate it; the fierce and stormy passions chained and pent up within him could not but have effect upon his outward manner. He had an impatient, irritable hauteur to his men quite foreign to him, for to his soldiers he was invariably generous and considerate; he was much more stern in his military orders, for before he had abhorred anything like martinetism; and there was a settled and iron gloom upon him with which every now and then it seemed as if the fiery nature in him were at war, struggling like the flames of a volcano within its prison of ice. From the time he took Dunbar's place as major of Ours, I never saw him *smile*, not once, that sunny, sweet, and radiant smile which used to light up his face so strangely, however haughty or grave the moment before. I never saw him smile, but I did see him now and then, when he was sitting smoking in the door of his tent, or riding beside me home from a dog-hunt or a hurdle-race, look across to where the sea lay, with a passionate agony in his eyes, which must have poured out its pent-up suffering in a resistless tide under the shadow of night and solitude. All he seemed to live for was headlong and reckless danger, if he could have had it. The thing that roused him the most since we left England was when St. Arnaud, Bosquet, Forey, and their staff rode along the front of our columns before Alma, and we were told what the Marshal said to the 55th: "English, I hope you will fight well to-day."

"By Heaven!" swore De Vigne, fiercely, "if I had been near that fellow I would have told him we will fight as we fought at Waterloo!"

*It was a bitter trial to him, as to us all, that the Cavalry*

could not do more on the 20th, when we sat in our saddles, seeing the serried columns of the Line dash through the hissing waters, red with blood and foaming with the storm of shot, and force their way through the vineyards of the Alma—that little tortuous stream where we tasted blood for the first time on Crimean soil, whose name, with all his self-command, made De Vigne wince more than a Cossack lance thrust through his side would have done. We had not enough to do to satisfy any one of us. Sabretasche had longed to lead the men, in whose efficiency to do anything he was almost as firm a believer as poor Nolan, on to some such brilliant charge as Anglesea's, when his magnificent rush of Royals, Grays, and Enniskilleners captured the eagles of D'Erlon's brigade; and De Vigne envied, with all the appreciation and admiring envy of a beau sabreur who knew what good fighting really was, the individual hair-breadth escape of the Guards, the rush of the Fusiliers, the way that Sir Colin's Highlanders won their bonnets. To have sit like targets for the Russians' round shots, though our men were as immovable as if that storm of balls that tore through our lines and ripped up our horses had been soft summer rain, was much too quiet business for any of us. When we awoke on the morning of the 23d to march on to Katcha, awoke in the dull, dusky fog, through which the watch-fires struggled with the heavy damp and dew, and the rich thrilling roll of the French horns and drums and trumpets, all blending in one wild flourish, came rolling its stirring music through the valley of the Alma, De Vigne looked back to the plain, where nigh eight hundred men lay wounded and helpless, with only one English surgeon—Thompson of the 44th—left with them to care for their great needs, and as he looked wished, I believe, that the stinging, throbbing agony of his life had been stilled there once forever, and

that he could have fallen in the stead of little Walsham of the Artillery, or Monck of the 7th, or any other of the many shoveled into those yawning pits hastily dug on the hill-side for the dead that had fallen among the vineyards of Alma.

Heaven forbid that I should intrude a history of the Crimean campaign upon you. Most of you have somebody either beside you, or in your family, or on your visiting list, who will tell you better than I can write—since each man sees things through his own lorgnon, and there never was a battle yet fought, nor even the most insignificant skirmish, of which each individual present had not his own particular account, differing in pretty well everything from his comrades—of all we did and all we did not do. Besides, the Crimea is getting rococo now, and it is the fashion to look at it as a dim era of the past, and the blood spilt and the bodies strewn so thick upon its barren steppes have been superseded in interest by the “great national movement” of those civilians who are just now frantically leaving briefs and banks, offices and chambers and consultation-rooms, to shoot at butts, and show themselves in the streets, after the eccentric manner of all amateurs, in the glory of their full sleeves, Albert hats, and waving cocktails. Heaven forbid that I should bore you with a history of the Crimea. We would fain have done much more there if they had let us, and what we did do we do not need to din into anybody, since it was our simplest and our plainest duty.

We were weary of inaction; our Arm of the service had had little or nothing to do; we were not allowed to push on the pursuit at Alma, nor the charge at Mackenzie's Farm; we were stung by certain individual sneers that we were “too fine gentlemen for our work,” and we were *longing to prove*, as we should have done long before if

opportunity had not been denied us, that if we were "above our business of collecting supplies for the army," we could, if we had the chance, send home to England such a tale as would show them how cheaply the fine gentlemen of the Light Cavalry held life when honor claimed it, and would cover our slanderers forever in the shame of their own lies. Whether it was from necessity or from injustice, opinions differed, but we felt that our Arm had not had the opportunities given us we might have had, and De Vigne was not alone in the bitter oaths he swore at the enforced inaction of the Light Cavalry, when we might have shown them what we could do, had we only been allowed, both at, and subsequent to, Alma. He was not alone in the glow of excitement and the hope of "something to do," when, at half-past seven, the news of the Russians' advance came down to our camp on the dawn of the 25th of October, and without time for the men to water the horses, or get any breakfast for themselves, we were roused by the notes of Boot and Saddle, and drawn up on the slopes behind the redoubts. The story of that day is well enough known in England. How brightly the sun shone that morning, dancing on the blue strip of sea, and flashing on the lines of steel gleaming and bristling below; on the solid masses of the Russians, with their glittering lances and sabers, and their gay accoutered skirmishers whirling before their line of march like swallows in the air; on the fierce-eyed, rapid, brilliant Zouaves lying behind the earthworks; on our Light and Heavy brigades in front of our camp; on Sir Colin's Highlanders drawn up *two deep*;—the 93d did not need to alter their line even to receive the magnificent charge of masses of Muscovite cavalry. How brightly the sun shone,—and how breathlessly we waited in that dead silence, only broken by the clink and the ring of the horses' bits and the unsheathing of sabers,

as the Russians came up the valley, those splendid masses of cavalry moving en echelon up to the attack. Breathless every man on the slopes and in the valley, French and English, soldier and amateur, waited, while the grand line of the Muscovite Horse rode on to the 93d, who quietly awaited them, motionless and impenetrable as a wall of granite, firm and invulnerable as their own Highland seawall—awaited them, till with their second volley, rolling out on the clear morning air, they sent that splendid body of horse flying, shivered, like sea-foam breaking on a rock. Then came the time for Scarlett and his Heavies—when the Russian Lancers, and Hussars, and Dragoons galloped over the hill, their squadrons twice our length and more than twice our depth, and the trumpets rang out twice, and Lord Raglan and his staff, the French generals and their masses of infantry, and all the lookers-on gathered up yonder on the heights, held their breath when Grays and Enniskilleners, with the joyous cheer of the one, the wild shout of the other ringing through the air, rushed at the massive columns of the Russians, charged in among them, shaking their serried masses as a hurricane shakes woodland trees; and closing with their second line as it came up to retrieve the lost honor of the priest-blessed Muscovite lances, mingled pêle-mêle with them, their swords crossing and flashing in the air, reckless of all odds, cutting their way inch by inch through the dense squadrons closing round them—those “beautiful gray horses” pushing their road with that dash and daring which had once won them Napoleon’s admiration—till the 1st Royals, the 4th and 5th Dragoon Guards, rushed in to the rescue, and sent the Russian columns flying over the plain like a routed herd of cattle without a leader. How the lookers-on cheered them, waving their caps in their hands and shouting *rapturous* applause, till the heights rang again, as the

Brigadier and his Heavies rode back from their assault!— and De Vigne muttered, as he glanced down the line of our light brigade:

“By Heaven! what wouldn’t I give to have ridden that charge with the Grays! When is our turn to come?”

Our turn was near at hand. An hour after we received the order to advance on the Russian guns. With the blame, on whomsoever it may lie of that rash order, I have nothing to do. That vexatious question can never be settled, since he on whose shoulders they place it lies in the valley of Balaklava, the first victim to it that fell, and cannot raise his voice to reply, or give the lie, if it be a lie, to his calumniators, as he would have done so fearlessly in his life. If Louis Nolan were to blame, his passionate love for our Arm of the service, and his jealousy over its honor, his belief that Light Cavalry would do all and anything though it were the work of demigods, and his irritation that hitherto we had not been given the opportunity we might have had, must plead his excuse; and I think his daring spirit, his brilliant courage, and the memory of that joyous cheer to his Hussars which ended in the wild death-cry which none who heard can ever forget, might be enough to silence the angry jar and jangle of contention above his grave, and set the seals of oblivion upon his error.

The order was given us to take the Russian guns. For the first time since we had landed a light of joy and pleasure came into the Colonel’s mournful eyes; and his old proud, glad, sunlit smile flashed over De Vigne’s face. We were so sick of inaction, of riding about the Chersonese doing nothing, and letting other men’s names go home in the dispatches!

The order was given to take the Russian guns. At ten minutes past eleven we of the Light Brigade shook our

bridles and dashed off in the morning sunlight toward the Russian battery. Lookers-on tell me they could hardly credit that we, so few in numbers, and entirely unsupported, were going to charge an army in position, and that they gave us up for hopeless destruction as we swept past them full gallop, the sunshine catching the points of our sabers and flashing off our harness. If they did not credit it, *we* did. We knew it was against all maxims of war for cavalry to act without support or infantry at hand. We knew that in all probability few indeed, if any of us, would ever come back from that rapid and deadly ride. But the order was given. There were the guns—and away we went, quickening from trot to canter, and from canter to gallop, as we drew nearer to them. On we went, spurring our horses across the space that divided us from those grim fiery mouths. On we went: Sabretasche's silvery voice cheering us on, and the delicate white hand that Belgravian belles admired pointing to the guns before us; De Vigne a little in advance of us all, sitting down in his saddle as in by-gone days, when he led the field across Northampton pastures or Leicestershire bulfinches, a glow upon his face, his eyes flashing fire, his teeth set, his fingers clinched on the true steel that had done trusty work for him before then among the Indian jungles. On we went. All *I* was conscious of was of a feverish exultation; a wild, causeless delight; a fierce, tiger-like longing to be at them and upon them. The ring of the horses' iron hoofs, the chink of the rattling bits, the dashing of chains and sabers, the whistle and screech of the bullets as they flew among us from the redoubt, all made a music in my ear to which my heart beat with delicious excitement. God knows how it is, but in such hours as that the last thing one thinks of is the death so near at hand. Though men reeled from their saddles and fell lifeless to the ground at every step,

and riderless chargers fled snorting and wounded from our ranks; though the guns from the redoubt poured on us as we swept past, and volleys of rifles and musketry raked our ranks; though every moment great gaps were made, till the fire broke our first line, and the second had to fill it up; though from the thirty guns before us poured a deadly fire, whose murderous balls fell among us as we rode, clearing scores of saddles, sweeping down horses and men, and strewing the plain as we passed with quivering human bodies, and chargers rolling over and over in their death-agony,—on we rode, down into that fiery embrace of smoke and flame that stretched out its arms and hissed its fell kisses at us from the Russian line. His sword whirling and flashing above his head, De Vigne spurred his horse into the dense smoke of the blazing batteries. With a cheer to his men, in that sweet and silvery voice that had whispered such soft love-vows in women's ears, Sabretasche led us in between the guns. Every one was for himself then, as we dashed into the battery and sabered the gunners at their posts, while the oblique fire from the hills, and the direct fire of musketry, poured in upon us. Prodigies of valor were done there never to be chronicled. Twice through the blinding smoke I saw De Vigne beside me—the Charmed Life, as they had called him in India—reckless of the storm of balls that fell about him, sitting in his saddle as firmly as if he were at a Pytchley meet. We had no breathing-time to think of others in that desperate struggle, but once I heard Pigott near me shout out, "The Colonel's down!" Thank God it was not true; down he was, to be sure, for his horse was killed under him by a round shot; but Sabretasche sprang up again in an instant, as calm and collected as though he were pacing the Ring in Hyde Park, vaulted on a riderless charger that was by him, and struck down a gunner the next moment, his face



all the while as pale and as impassive as if he were in a drawing-room at home. That wild *mêlée*! I can remember nothing distinctly in it, save the mad thirst for blood that at such a time rises in one as savagely as in a beast of prey. A shot struck my left arm, breaking the bone above my wrist; but I was conscious of no pain as we broke through the column of Russian infantry, sending them flying before us, broken and scattered like thistle-down upon the wind, and were returning from our charge as brilliantly as the Scots and Enniskilleners had returned from theirs, when, as you know, the flank fire from the hill battery opened upon us—an enemy we could not reach or silence—and a mass of Russian Lancers were hurled upon our flank. Shewell and his 8th cut through them—we stayed for an encounter, hemmed in on every side, shrouded—our little handful of men—by the dense columns of their troops. It was hot work, work that strewed the plain with the English Light Brigade, as a harvest-field is strewn with wheat-ears ere the sheaves are gathered. But we should have broken through them still, no matter what the odds, for there were deeds of individual daring done in that desperate struggle which would make the chilliest blood glow, and the most lethargic listener kindle into admiration. We should have cut through them, *coûte que coûte*, but that horrible volley of grape and canister, on which all Europe has cried shame, poured on friend and foe from the gunners who had fled before our charge, the balls singing with their murderous hiss through the air, and falling on the striving mass of human life, where English and Russian fought together, carrying death and destruction with its coward fire into the ranks of both, and stamping the Church-blessed troops of the Czar with ineffaceable infamy.

It was with bitter hearts and deadly thoughts that we,

the remnant of the Six Hundred, rode back, leaving the flower of the Light Brigade dead or dying before those murderous Russian guns;—and it was all done, all over, in five-and-twenty minutes—less than a fox-hunt would have taken at home!

De Vigne was unhurt. The Charmed Life must still have had his spell about him, for if any man in the Cavalry had risked danger and courted death that day he had done so; but he rode out of the lines at Balaklava without even a scratch. Sabretasche had been hit by a ball which had only grazed his shoulder; the delicate and raffiné man of fashion would have laughed at a much more deadly wound. We were not too “fine gentlemen” for *that* work, but rather went through it perhaps the better for having come of a race that for many generations had never “fucked,” and bearing names that cowardice or dishonor had never touched. With tears standing in his eyes, Sabretasche looked back one morning to the plain where so many of his Dashers had fallen, torn and mangled in the bloody jaws of those grim batteries, the daring spirits quenched, the vigorous lives spent, the gallant forms food for the worms, and he turned to De Vigne with a mournful smile, “*Cui bono?*”

True indeed—*cui bono?* that waste of heroic human life. There was a bitter significance in his favorite sarcasm, which the potentates, who for their own private ends had drenched the Chersonese in blood, would have found it hard to answer. *Cui bono* indeed! Their bones lie whitening there in the valley of Balaklava; fresh fancies amuse and agitate the nations; the Light Cavalry charge is coldly criticised and pronounced tomfoolery, and their names are only remembered in the hearts of some few women whose lives were desolation when they fell.

## III.

## THE BRIDAL JEWELS GO TO THE MONT DE PIÉTÉ.

IN their salon in the Champs Elysées, that crowded, gaudy, and much-bedizened room, sat, as they had sat twelve months before, old Fantyre and the Trefusis, the old woman huddled up among a pile of cushions, shawls, and furs, with her feet on a chaufferette, older and uglier, with her wig awry, and her little piercing black eyes roving about like a monkey's as she drank her accustomed demie tasse, which, as I before observed, looked most suspiciously like cognac undefiled; the younger one, with her coarse, dashing, full-blown, highly-tinted beauty not shown off to the best advantage, for it was quite early morning, madame n'était pas visible; of course, in common with all Parisiennes, whether Parisienne by birth or by adoption; and not being visible, the Trefusis had not thought it worth her while to dress, but hastily enveloped in a peignoir, looked certainly, though she was a fine woman still, not exactly calculated to please the taste of a high-born gentleman used to the sight and the society of delicate aristocrats, (though, truly, before *they* are made up, some of those self-same delicate aristocrats!—but, taissons nous! If we pried into the composition of the entremets at Vé-sours' or the Trois Frères, should we enjoy the dainties of them?)

"Well, my dear, ain't he killed yet?" demanded old Fantyre, in her liveliest treble.

"No," said the Trefusis, running her eye through the returns of the 25th October. "Major Halkett, Captain Nolan, Lord Fitzgibbon—lots of them—but——"

"*Not the right one,*" chuckled the old Fantyre, who,

though she had her own private reasons for desiring De Vigne's demise, as his property was so ruled that a considerable portion must have come to his wife whether he had willed it so or not, had still that exquisite pleasure in the Trefusis's mortification which better people than the old Viscountess indulge in now and then at their friends' expense. "Dunce take the man! Tiresome creature it is; shot and saber carry off lots of pretty fellows out there. Why on earth can't they touch him? And that beautiful creature, Vivian Sabretasche, is *he* all right?"

"Slightly wounded—that's all."

"How cross you are, my dear. If you must not wear widow's weeds, I can't help it, can I? They're not becoming, my dear—not at all; though if a woman knows how to manage 'em, she may do a good deal under her crape. Men ain't afraid of a widow as they are of an unmarried woman, though Heaven knows they need be if they knew all; the 'dear departed' 's a capital dodge to secure a new pigeon. Mark my words, my dear, De Vigne won't die just because you wish him!"

"Wish him!" reiterated the Trefusis. "How disagreeably you phrase things, Lady Fantyre."

"Give 'em their right names, my dear? Yes, I believe that *is* uncommon disagreeable for most people," chuckled the old woman. "In my time, you know, we weren't so particular; if we did naughty things (and we did very many, my dear, almost as many as people do now!) we weren't ashamed to call 'em by their dictionary names. Humbug's a new-fangled thing, as well as a new-fangled word. They say we were coarse; I don't know, I'm sure; I suppose we were; but I know we didn't love things under the rose and sneak out of 'em in daylight as you nineteenth-century people do; our men, if they went to the casinos at night, didn't go to Bible meetings, and Maintenance-of-

Immaculate-Society boards, and Regenerated Magdalens' Refuges the next morning—as they do now-a-days. However, if we were more consistent, we weren't so Christian, I suppose! Lor' bless me, what a deal of cant there is about in the world now! even you, whom I did think was pretty well as unscrupulous as anybody I ever met, won't allow you'd have liked to see De Vigne among them returns. I know when poor old Fantyre died, Lady Rougepot says to me, 'What a relief, my dear!' and I'm sure I never thought of differing from her for a minute! You've never had but one checkmate in your life, Constance—with that little girl Trevelyan—Tressillian—what's her name?"

"Little devil!" said the Trefusis, bitterly; she had not grown the choicest in her expressions, from constant contact with the Fantyre. "I saw her again the other day."

"Here?"

"Yes; in the Rue Vivienne—in a fleuriste's shop. I passed her quite close. She knew me again; I could tell that by the scorn there was in her eyes and the sneer that came on her lips. Little fool! with the marriage certificate before her very eyes, she wouldn't believe the truth. The scheme was so good it deserved complete success. I hate that little thing—such a child as she looks, to have put one down and outgeneraled one's plans."

"Child!" chuckled old Fantyre; "she wasn't so much of a child but what she could give you one of the best retorts I ever heard: 'It was a pity you didn't learn the semblance of a lady to support you in the assumption of your rôle!' Vastly good, vastly good; how delighted Selwyn would have been with that."

"Little devil!" repeated the Trefusis again. "I hate the sight of that girl's great dark-blue eyes. De Vigne shall never see her again if I can help it, little, contemptuous, haughty creature!"

"She's a lady, ain't she?" said the Fantyre, dryly.

"I'm sure I don't know. She is as proud as a princess, though she's nothing but an artist after all. Good gracious! Who is that?" said the Trefusis, as she heard a ring at the entrance, giving a hurried dismayed glance at her negligée. "It can't be Anatole nor De Brissac; they never come so early."

"If they do, my dear, beauty unadorned, you know——"

"Stuff!" said the Trefusis, angrily. "Beauty unadorned would get uncommonly few admirers in these days. Perhaps it's nobody for us."

As she spoke a servant entered, and brought her a piece of paper with a few words on it, unfolded and unsealed.

"What's that, my dear?" asked Lady Fantyre, eagerly.

"Only my dressmaker," said the Trefusis, with affected carelessness, but with an uneasy frown, which did not escape the quick old lady.

"Dressmaker!" chuckled the Fantyre, as she was left alone. "If you've any secrets from me, my dear, we shall soon quarrel. I've no objection whatever to living with you as long as you have that poor fellow's three thousand a year, and we can make a tidy little income with you to attract the young men, and me to play whist and écarté with 'em; but if you begin to hold any cards I don't see I shall throw up the game, though we have played it some time together."

While old Fantyre—who had this single virtue among all her vices, that she was candid about them, more than can be said of most sinners—thus talked to herself over her cognac and coffee, the Trefusis had gone, demi-toilette and all, into the salle, where there awaited her a neat, slight, fair man, with a delicate badine and gold studs, who looked something between a valet, an actor,

and a would-be dandy—such as you may see by scores any day in Oxford Street, or on the Boulevards, hanging about the Bads, or lounging in the parterre of the Odéon.

He smiled, a curious, slight smile, as the Trefusis entered.

“Vous voila, madame! Not en grande tenue to-day; too early for your pigeons, I suppose? I dare say you and the old lady make a very good thing out of it, though of course you only entertain immaculate society, for fear you should give the Major a chance to bring you up before a certain law court, eh?”

“What did you come for so soon again?” demanded the Trefusis, abruptly, with as scant courtesy as might be. “I have only five minutes to spare, you had better not waste it in idle talk.”

“What do I come for, ma belle? Now, what *should* I come for? What do I ever come for, pray?” returned her visitor, in nowise displeased, but rather amused at her annoyance.

“Money!” retorted the Trefusis, with an angry glare. “You will get none to-day, I can assure you!”

The man laughed.

“Now why always keep up this little farce? Money I wish for—money you will give me. Why make the same amusing little denial of it every time?”

“It is no amusing little denial to-day, at all events,” said the Trefusis, coldly. “I have none left. I cannot give you what I have not.”

He laughed, and played a tattoo with the cornelian head of his cane.

“Very well, then I will go to the Major.”

“You cannot. He is in the Crimea.”

“To the Crimea I can go to-morrow, belle amie, in the *service of a gentleman* who has a fancy to visit it. But I

am tired of playing the valet, though it is amusing enough sometimes; and, indeed, as you pay so very badly, I have been thinking of writing to De Vigne; he will give me anything I ask, for my information."

The Trefusis's eyes grew fiercer, but she turned pale and wavered.

"A line of mine will tell the Major, you know, *belle amie*—and the crime is actionable—and I don't fancy he will be inclined to be very gentle to his wife—née Lucy Davis, eh?" he went on, amused to watch the changes on her face. He will pay very highly, too—what are a few thousands to him?—he is as lavish as the winds, as proud as the devil, and, hating *Mme. sa femme* as he does, he will give me, I have no doubt, anything I ask. It will be a much better investment for me; I won't trouble you any more, Lucy; I shall write to the Major at once."

He rose, and took his hat; but the Trefusis interrupted him.

"Stay—wait a moment—how much do you want?"

"Fifty pounds now, and as much this day week."

"Impossible! I have not half——"

"Glad to hear it, madame. The Major will be the much better paymaster. With his thousands I can get a life annuity, buy stock, take shares, do what I like, even—who knows?—become an eminently respectable member of society! Adieu! *belle amie*; when we next meet it will be in the law courts over the water."

"Villain!" swore the Trefusis, with a fierce flash of her black eyes.

He laughed:

"Not at all; you have the monopoly of any villainy there may be in the transaction. Adieu! what shall I say from you to the Major—any tender message?"

"Wait," cried the Trefusis, hurriedly. "I have five napa



—I could let you have more to-morrow; and—you could take one of my bracelets——”

“One! No, thank you, the other plan will be best for me. I am tired of these installments, and De Vigne——”

“But—my diamonds, then—the ceinture he was fool enough to give me——” She tried to speak coldly, but there was a trembling eagerness in her manner which belied her assumed calmness.

“Fool, indeed!—and to think he was a man of the world! Your diamonds!—*ma chère*, you must be in strange fear, indeed, to offer me them. They must be worth no end, or they would not be the Major’s giving. Those bracelets he bought for the Little Tressillian cost a hundred the pair, I know: splendid emeralds they were! he thought I never saw them, but they laid five minutes on his dressing-table before he sealed them up. He was always careless in those things: I believe, aristocrat as he was, he thought servants had neither eyes nor ears, instead of having them, in point of fact, just doubly acute. Well,” he went on—he had only made this lengthened digression to annoy his listener—“Well, come, let us look at those diamonds—I am willing to spare you, if I can, for old acquaintance sake.”

When he left the house he carried with him that magnificent diamond ceinture which De Vigne had bought, in his lover’s madness, for his bride nine years before, and took it up to the Mont de Piété. Three thousand a year was not a bad income, but the Trefusis’s dress, the Fantyre’s wines, the petits soupers, and the numerous Paris agréments and amusements ran away with it very fast, and though écarté, vingt-ét-un, and whist added considerably to their resources, the Trefusis was very often hard up, as people who have lived on their wits all their lives not unfrequently are. One would fancy such sharpening upon the grindstone of

want might teach them economy in prosperity; but I don't think it often does; the canaille ever glory in the vulgar pride of money, waste hundreds in grand dinners, and—grudge the pineapple. Besides, the Trefusis, too, had a drain on her exchequer, of which the world and even Argus-eyed old Fantyre was ignorant.

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## PART THE TWENTIETH.

### I.

#### HOW DE VIGNE MARRIED HIS OWN FATE A SECOND TIME.

WINTER in the Crimea—the Crimea of 1854–55. The very words are enough to bring up again to one that sharp, stinging wind, of whose concentrated cold none can imagine in the faintest degree, save those who have weathered a winter in tents on the barren steppes before Sebastopol. Writing those very words is enough to bring up before one the bleak, chill, dark stretch of ground, with its horrible roads turned to water-courses, or frozen like miles of broken glass; the slopes, vast morasses of mud and quagmire, or trackless wastes of snow; the hurricane, wild as a tropical tornado, whirling the tents in mid-air, and turning men and horses roofless into the terrible winter night; the long hours of darkness, of storm, of blinding snow, of howling wind, of pouring ink-black rain, in which the men in the trenches and the covering parties and pickets watched with eyes that must never close and senses that might never weary; the days when under those pitiless skies officers and men shared alike the common fate, worse clad than a beggar, worse cared for than a cab-horse;—all rise up be-

fore one as by incantation at those mere words, Winter in the Crimea.

I need not dwell upon it; I read the other day that people had heard quite enough of the "undivine story" of the Russian war. I scarcely know what that epithet may mean; wars never, that I am aware of, set up for being "divine;" but if we could boast but little divinity among us, (and I think the "most eminently pious person" would have been tempted to swear hard had such a one been present to enjoy the hurricane of the 14th of November,) I fancy the men showed what was better and more to the purpose—heroism true and dauntless; the heroism most difficult of all in life—the heroism of endurance. I think one can want nothing nobler, or so far more "divine," than Tom Trowbridge, with his legs upon the gun-carriage, refusing to move "till the battle's won;" or Strangway's gentle "Will any one be kind enough to lift me off my horse?" than the steady work in the trenches in ten hours of furious rain and freezing cold; work done day after day, night after night, turning out into the mire and misery of the traverses with hungry stomachs and clothes that were rags?

My left arm turned out so tedious and tiresome that I was obliged to go down to Balaklava for a short time. The day before I went up again to the front, anxious, you are sure, to be with the Dashers as soon as ever I could, a transport came into harbor with a reinforcement of the —th from England. I watched them land; their fresh, healthy faces, their neat uniforms, their general trim, and all-over-like-going look, contrast enough to the men in the trenches at the front; and as I was looking at them disembark I saw a face I knew well, indeed—the face fair and delicate as a girl, with his long light curls and his blue eyes, and his lithe slight figure, of Curly, our little Curly

of Frestonhills. Twelve months before, as I have said, Curly had changed from his captaincy in the Coldstreams to the lieutenant-colonelcy of the —th, and had been savage enough at having done so when the Household Troops went out to the Crimea; but now his turn had come, to his own unspeakable satisfaction, for Curly had always longed to have a taste of that real campaigning which De Vigne had invariably passionately assured us was the sole good thing in life. We met as old friends did meet out there, doubly bound together by a common cause, and we had a long haver that night, over pipes and some of the pure cognac he had brought out with him to the land where brandy, like everything else, was filthy, adulterated, and fabulously priced; of mutual acquaintance and topics of mutual interest; of the things that had been done in England since we left, and the things we had done ourselves in the Chersonese. Knowing nothing of those fierce words which had passed between Curly and De Vigne, I was surprised at the silence with which Curly listened to my details of the heroic pluck with which our Frestonhills hero had cut his way through the Russian squadrons on the morning of the 25th; knowing nothing, either, of the wild love which had entered into them both for the same woman, I set my foot in it unawares by asking him if he had seen the Little Tressillian before he left. Curly, though Heaven knows life had seasoned him as it had seasoned us all, till our faces could be as silent and impassive under the most stinging mental pain as any soulless, bloodless statue's, busied himself with poking up his pipe, while a flush rose over his fair girlish brow, and the muscles of his lips twitched nervously, as he answered simply, "No!"

"No! What, didn't you even go to bid her good-by? I thought *you admired* that little thing beyond expression,

though she used to compliment Sir Folko at your and my expense? Do you mean to say you never went down to St. Crucis before you came off here?"

"For Heaven's sake, Arthur, hold your tongue!" said Curly, more sharply than I had ever heard him speak; he who, when Poulteuey Hay had forged the check in his name for 500*l.*, had begged us not to be hard on "the poor dear fellow," and had busied himself in hushing the matter up as anxiously as though he were the criminal. "It is grossest brutality to jest on such a subject."

"Brutality to ask after the Little Tressillian?" I repeated, in sheer amazement. "My dear fellow, what on earth do you mean? What has happened to Alma? Is she dead?"

"Would to Heaven she were, rather than what they say she is: another added to Vane Castleton's list of victims!"

The anguish in his voice was unmistakable. I stared at him in amazement. The Little Tressillian gone over to Vane Castleton! That girl whose face was truth, and innocence, and candor in itself; who had seemed never happy save in De Vigne's presence; who had lavished on him whenever she saw him such fond, enthusiastic words, with all a woman's eloquence and all a child's abandon! I stared at him in mute bewilderment. The bursting of Whistling Dick between us at that moment would not have startled or astonished me more.

"Alma—Vane Castleton! My dear Curly, there must be some mistake."

"God knows!" he answered between his teeth. "*I do not credit it, yet there are the facts: She has left St. Crucis; her nurse saw her leave in Castleton's brougham, and she has never returned. She must have been deluded away; she never could have gone willingly. He may have lured her with a false marriage. God knows! women are*

sometimes dazzled by rank, and he is bad enough for anything. I should have found him out to know the truth, and shot him dead if he had beguiled her away against her will, but I never heard of it until the very day before we sailed. I could not leave my regiment at the eleventh hour."

"Do you care so much for her, then?" I said, involuntarily, in surprise; for, though I knew Curly had often sworn the Little Tressillian was the most charming thing he had ever come across, he had lavished equally enthusiastic epithets on no end of other women, and I never dreamt he had felt anything deeper for her.

"I loved her very dearly," said Curly, simply, with his pipe between his lips. "Don't talk of it again, Arthur, please; she cared nothing for me, but her name is too precious to me to hear it mentioned without respect, and I am sure there is some error yet. I will never believe her face told a lie."

He was silent; and since the loss of Alma had stung him so keenly and so deeply that not even the elasticity of his gay, light, affectionate nature could rebound or recover from it, it was easy to understand how it had overwhelmed De Vigne's stronger, more fiery, more vehement, and far more retentive nature, if, as I doubted not, the love that Sabretasche had predicted had come between himself and the Little Tressillian.

The fierce words that had passed between them were not forgotten. De Vigne was not a man to forgive in a moment that bitter accusation of cowardice, which no one but Curly would have breathed to him without receiving punishment, whose mark he would have carried on him all his life. Curly, with reasons of his own for believing that, true or untrue, the story of Alma's flight with Vane Castleton, the *heart of the woman* he loved was De Vigne's,

and De Vigne's alone, sought no reconciliation with his once idolized Frestonhills hero. Perhaps he harbored a suspicion—unjust indeed, but men in love and jealous of their rivals seldom pause to do them justice—that it was to Granville, and not to Vane Castleton, Alma had flown, for he knew De Vigne was so thorough a soldier that he would have left the most exquisite happiness, or the woman he most tenderly loved, at any call to arms. They seldom met—De Vigne being in Lord Lucan's camp, and Curly in that of the Light Division—and they avoided each other by mutual consent. The love of woman had come between them, and stretched like a great gulf between De Vigne and the young fellow he had liked ever since he was a little fair-haired, bright-eyed boy.

Curly came just in time for that gray wintry dawn, when the bells of Sebastopol rang through the dark, foggy air, and the dense masses of troops, for whom mass had been said, stole through the falling rain up the heights of the valley of Inkermann. He was in time for those hand-to-hand struggles—those wild assaults, those daring repulses, with which, in glen, and glade, and valley, in separate knots and remote corners, amid thick rain and tangled brushwood, and thorny brakes and foggy gloom, through which they could see neither enemy nor friend—in which the steady heroism of England and the dashing gallantry of France repelled the picked troops of the Muscovite, stimulated by brandy, assured of victory by their Czar's son, and promised the best joys of Heaven by their priests if they should fall. He was in time to rush to the front with the rest of the Light Division on that dark and desperate morning, when the Duke and his Guards held the Sandbag Battery under the deadly mitraille and the volleys of rifle and musketry; when officers dropped like hail, *singled out*, as they ever are, in the onslaught; when Cath-

cart fell with the bullet through his brain, and Sir George Brown was carried wounded off the field, and the Zouaves dashed to the rescue at their merry *Pas de charge*, and the Chasseurs d'Afrique, on their gray Arabs, charged with all the brilliance and elan of their nation; and all through the dark, gloomy valley raged those fierce struggles, those desperate rallies, those sanguinary combats hand to hand, which made up the battle of Inkermann, and strewed the wet, marshy ground with groups, under every bush and in every ravine, of the bearskins of our Guards, the gray great-coats of the Russians, and the bright-blue uniforms of the Chasseurs, the men lying *pêle-mêle* together as they had fallen in the death-grapple—some calm, tranquil, with their lips just open as the rifle had hit them down, life ceasing instantaneously; others horrible to look upon, with every feature wrung in the agonies of their last throes, clinching the grass they had torn up in their suffering as existence had passed slowly, unwillingly, agonizingly away.

Curly was in time for Inkermann—that battle where not twenty thousand English and French repulsed fifty thousand or more Russians, which was heroic as Thermopylæ, sanguinary as Maya; and he was in time for the winter work in the trenches, where he, so late the young Adonis of the Guards, the “best style” in the Park, the fashionable young blondin, the darling of Belgravian boudoirs, who at home never began his day till two o'clock—a day of morning calls, of *dejeûners*, of flirtations, of gay mess-luncheons, of gayer opera-suppers, with his dinners perfection, with his wines of the best, and his greatest exertion to get up in time for Epsom, or cram all his engagements into one night—had to turn into the trenches in rain which made the traverses like Dutch dykes, or in blinding snow blown into his eyes by a wind that cut into him sharply as any bayonet's thrust; to come back to a



tent without fire, to food either semi-raw or else burnt black as a cinder; to sleep rudely, roused by a hurricane that whirled away his sole frail shelter, and turned him out into the bitter black Crimean night. That winter showed us campaigning with the gloss off; there were no marches through pleasant countries, no halts at villages or towns, no billeting in different places, where there was change of scene, and wine, and pretty women, as our fathers and grandfathers had had in the Peninsula; no brilliant succession of battles, the space between each filled up with the capture of fallen cities, and balls and love-making in friendly ones, such as make the history of the war among the green sierras of Spain so favorite a theme for fiction and romance; there was nothing but an eternal cannonading from the dawn of one day to the dawn of another—nothing but a long, dreary, protracted siege, and confinement to a camp, to get away from which a reconnaissance party was hailed with delight—nothing but months dragging away one after another, seeing horses and men dying off by scores.

We should soon have been dismounted if we had not been ordered into Balaklava—our light sinewy, fiery, gallant grays lay rotting in heaps, or stiffened and frozen in the mud. The first thing that seemed to soften the stern, silent gloom that had gathered round De Vigne was when his horse, Sultan, that followed him like a dog and took sugar from his hand, and that had brought him safe out of the lines at Balaklava, weakened with starvation and frozen with cold, turned his dying eyes upon his master, shivered, rolled on his side, and died with one last faint gasping sigh. It was the only thing he thought that loved him, and De Vigne loved it in return; the gray had been a truer friend than man, a more faithful one than woman. He stooped *over the horse* where he lay and kissed him on the fore-

head, and his eyes were dim as he turned away from the dead charger that had served him so long and had died so painfully—token that, despite the ice that his cruel wrong and his great anguish had closed around him, the warm loving heart of the man was still beating strong within him. The sufferings of his men around him, too—the men who all braved that winter, never despaired, rarely complained, and kept stout hearts through all their unspeakable wretchedness, their extremity of misery, while England seemed to forget and to neglect them;—absorbed as De Vigne was by that passionate and bitter love which had cost him so dear, he exerted himself to the utmost to alleviate these sufferings, and it was well for him that he was forced from himself into the midst of the misery around him. He was furious that the army should be left to suffer and rot here, while in England they persisted in believing that we had all we could possibly want. If by paying down all his fortune he could have brought to the Crimea the huts, the warm clothing, the medicines, the supplies, the reserves of strong able-bodied regiments that we wanted, I believe he would have done it without pause or regret. As it was, where the commonest necessities became luxuries scarcely to be bought at the most extravagant prices, he could do little or nothing. As it was, he had to stand by and see men and horses dying away for simple lack of care and shelter; the flower of that army wasted, which—a soldier's son—he loved as devotedly as Quintus Curtius Rome; holding his own life as nothing could he by any personal sacrifice have given any aid or added any glory to the Service, caring nothing as long as he had opportunity to do his best, and justice done his regiment, whether his own deeds were unnoticed or rewarded with a line in the *Gazette*. He did all he could to cheer and animate the men, and they listened to him as to a demi-god, rever-

ing him for those slashing back-handed strokes which had cut his way for him through the carnage at Balaklava, and having a sort of superstitious belief in his Indian sobriquet of the "Charmed Life." The exertions which his devotion to the Service impelled him to, did him a certain good—it roused him a little from the dead gloom which had closed around him; the sufferings he saw and could not aid, not those of wounds and death—to such he was accustomed—but the sufferings of disease which common aid might have prevented; of privations excelling those of beggars, which he justly thought a disgrace to an age of civilization and luxury—these, to a certain extent softened that harsh and bitter indifference to every living thing which had grown upon him, and the *reality* of the life he led awoke him in a degree from his own thoughts; while at the same time the weary inactivity of the siege, which weighed down even the lightest hearts before Sebastopol, was but one long torture to a man who longed for danger and excitement as the sole anodyne to a passion which pursued him as the Furies pursued Orestes.

Those who knew Sabretasche as we had known him, the luxurious owner of the luxurious Dilcoosha; as the fastidious man of fashion, of art, of taste, whose senses were so refined at once by nature and by indulgence, that he shrank from everything that was not the highest perfection of refinement, as the young Mozart shrank from a discordant chord and fainted at the harsh notes of a horn—those who knew as I did that all his life long there had been no elegance, no beauty he had not gathered round him to shut out the coarser and harsher material world, would have wondered at the simple uncomplaining heroism with which he bore deprivations and discomforts, at the mere recital of which he would have shuddered and turned away twelve *months before*, asking you, with his soft low laugh, "Not

to jar on his feelings with such distressing and distasteful details!" Many of those who had sneered (behind his back) at his Sybaritism, bore the miseries of that Crimean winter far less uncomplainingly and gallantly than the high-bred gentleman who came from the heart of the most refined luxury, with all his aristocrat's habits, his artist's tastes, his inborn fastidiousness, into greater privation, discomfort, and wretchedness, than any not present there can imagine, to endure a campaign, where the wild Chersonese hurricane turned him out at night, shelterless, to the full fury of the storm; where his food was often such as at home he would have forbidden to be given to his Newfoundland; where his servant had sometimes to fight with another for some scanty brushwood to light his fire; where loathsome centipedes crawled over his very bed; where he had to wade through mud, and rain, and filth, over paths marked out by the sick and dying fallen by the roadside, and the carrion birds whirling aloft over the spot where the corpses lay. Yet I never heard him utter a complaint, except, indeed, when he turned to me with a smile:

"How horrible it is, Arthur, not to be able to wash one's hands!"

The winter in the Chersonese was contrast enough to the life of love, and luxury, and joy he had painted with all the brilliance of his poet's mind, all the tenderness of his lover's heart, sitting in Violet Molyneux's boudoir, looking into the loving, radiant eyes of the woman who should now have been his wife! He was uniformly gentle and kind to those with whom he came in contact; his very delicacy and extreme sensitiveness, joined to his proud hatred of anything like pity or discussion, made him hide as much as was possible the deadly grief he carried with him day and night. Sometimes he would exert himself to talk in something of his old strain, though he never affected

to conceal that he had lost all in losing her; and beneath the sad, grave gentleness of his manner, it was easy to see how bitterly his heart was aching—aching with that dull, hopeless anguish for which time has no cure. One night, just before we were ordered into Balaklava, a friend of his, a member of the Lower House, who had come out to have a look at the Crimea, and was staying on board one of the vessels in the harbor, was dining with Sabretasche—De Vigne, a French colonel of cavalry, whom Sabretasche had known in Paris, a man of the 9th Lancers, and myself, making up the party. All of us thought of the Colonel's charming dinners in Park Lane or the Dilcoosha; of his rare wines, his exquisite cookery, his noiseless servants, his perfect appointments, his choice company—the best wits, the greatest authors, the men of highest ton, as we sat down to this, the best money could procure, and miraculously luxurious for the Crimea—a turkey, some preserved beef, and a little jam, with some brandy and whisky, for which his man had paid a price you would not believe, if I recorded it parole d'honneur.

"I am equally glad to see you, Carlton," said Sabretasche, "but I'm afraid I can't entertain you quite so well as I did in Park Lane. Il faut manger pour vivre, else I fancy you would hardly be inclined to touch much of anything we can give you in the Crimea."

"Peste, Sabretasche! il ne pensera guère à cela; nous avons ici la meilleure chose—notre Amphitryon," said De Courcy-Reynal, with a warmth that meant more than mere Parisian courtesy.

"Quite true, monsieur," said Carlton, "Sabretasche's wines *were* perfection, but they were not what made those 'little dinners' of his the most delightful things in town. I wonder when we shall have you back among us, Colonel?"

"Not till we've given the Muscovites such a thrashing

as they'll never get over," said Egerton of the 9th—those dashing Lancers who were cut up at Balaklava almost to a man; which remark was a prelude to such a discussion of tactics, probabilities, justice and injustice, what had been done that shouldn't have been done, and what hadn't been done that should have been done, with all the different versions of the Light Cavalry charge, as was certain to take place where there were five cavalry men talking, and an amateur who wanted to hear everything we had to tell him.

"You're quite a héros de roman, De Vigne, in England," laughed Carlton. "Lady Puffdoff and scores of your old loves are gone more mad about you than ever, and have been working their snowy fingers to the bone over all sorts of wool things for you and the rest of the Dashers, that are now tumbling about in the holds, and will rot in Balaklava harbor, I suppose, till the hot weather comes."

"Héros de roman!" said De Vigne, with his most contemptuous sneer. "If the people at home would just believe the men are dying away here, more than three thousand sick in camp, and would provide for them with just a little common practical sense, instead of sending us unroasted coffee, and stoves that may kill the fellows as they killed poor Smeaton of the Artillery, and letting the warm clothing rot in the holds, and the huts go to pieces on the beach, they'd do us more service than by writing ballads about us, and showering poetical epithets on us that they'll forget in twelve months' time, when they are running after some new hobby."

De Vigne spoke prophetically!

"But you still like campaigning, despite it all, old fellow?" asked Carlton.

"I wish my life could be one long campaign," said De Vigne, his eyes flashing with something besides even his

love for the Service; then he laughed, as he went on, "If I were a medical man, and had to deal with hypochondriacs, frenzied poets, nervous littérateurs, or worn-out public men, I would send them all off to active service. Boot and Saddle would soon have all the nonsense out of them, and send them back much healthier and better fellows. Campaigning is the only thing to put a dash of cayenne pepper into the soup of life."

"Our cayenne gets rather damped here," smiled Sabretasche. "I remember when I was five-and-twenty, and lounged down the shady side of Pall Mall, I thought nothing would be so pleasant as a hot campaign in India; and when I had had five years of hot campaigning, I thought nothing would be so pleasant as the shady side of Pall Mall. It *was* very agreeable as far as the danger and excitement went, but I confess I preferred my house in Park Lane to a tent for continuous residence. I missed my studio—to sketch with the thermometer at 130 was simply impossible. I had plenty of models, but no marble, no chisel, and no time. I missed my *Times*, my reading-chair, my periodicals, my papers; above all, society. All these are great agréments of life."

"But confess, Colonel, weren't you less fastidious and less dandified after India than before?" asked De Vigne.

"I never was much of a dandy. I dress well, of course; any man of good taste does that by simple instinct. As for fastidiousness, I managed with a shirt a week in India, because I couldn't have more; but I hated it, and had one or two per diem as soon as ever I went back. I let my beard grow there because I had no possible time to have it shaved; but I was delighted to have it off again as soon as ever I reached Calcutta——"

"Nonsense! What are shirts or beards, compared with the *verve*, the excitement, the reality of existence that

one finds in active service? I remember one night, when I was riding through a hilly pass in Lahore, with only my man Niel with me, we were set upon by half a dozen mountain robbers, some ten miles north of Attock, where the road, shelving on a precipice, wasn't more than twenty paces wide. I shot one of the devils dead, the other revolver flashed in the pan, and poor Niel rolled over the precipice, carrying his foe with him, in their death-grapple. There was I, single-handed against those four brutes, and I never enjoyed anything better."

"Of course. How did it end?"

"Oh! in nothing wonderful," continued De Vigne. "I set my back against the rock and defended myself as well as I could. I ran one of them through the body, and before I could draw my sword out one of them sent his spear into my wrist. I've the mark of it now. That put up my blood. I pitched one poor wretch over the rock; another turned and fled, yelling out it must be that cursed Feringhee, the 'Charmed Life,' it was no use trying to kill me; and I held the last, and gave him such a drubbing with the flat side of my saber that I left him there prostrate, and utterly unconscious to anything that happened. My horse had been grazing quietly, I caught him easily, and galloped back to Attock considerably elated, I assure you. Could a soiless shirt and a smooth chin outweigh an hour of real life like that?"

"Certainly not. If our days here were all twenty-fifths of October, they would be too delightful," said Sabretasche, with that sad smile which, when he exerted himself to be cheerful, showed how painful and unreal the effort was. "All I say is, my dear Granville, that I do prefer an Auxerre carpet to this extremely perilous mud; that I do like much better to have nice hot water and almond soap, to being only able to wash my hands at very distant inter-



vals. It would be ridiculous to pretend that I don't think a dinner at the Star and Garter more palatable than this tough turkey; nor my usual Bond Street coats more agreeable to wear than these ragged and nondescript garments!"

"And yet one has never heard a word of complaint from that fellow from our first bivouac till now!" said De Vigne to Carlton. Granville had an evident attachment to the Colonel, strengthened, if possible, by the uncomplaining courage and gallantry with which, in common with almost all there, the man of fashion and refinement bore every deprivation.

"*Cui bono?*" smiled Sabretasche. "It all comes in the fortune of war, and it is a soldier's duty to take whatever turns up, whether it is exactly to his taste or not. Besides, there is not a murmur heard out here; the Dashers will hardly set the example! Come, Carlton, you have not told us half the news."

Carlton told us plenty of news: of marriages and deaths; intrigues of the boudoir and the cabinet; of who had won the Grand Military, and who was favorite for the Cesarewitch—that race due to the Romanoff, whose forces lay in the great city we besieged; of how Dunbar had married Ela Ashburnham, and Jack Mortimer's wife run away with his groom; of how Fitzturf had been outlawed for seventy thousand, and Monteith made a pot of money at the October meetings; of all the odds and ends of the chat, on dits, scandales, and gossip he had brought from the lobby, the clubs, and the drawing-room; of that set of which we were members.

"I say, De Vigne," said he, at the last, "do you remember that bewitching Little Tressillian that was at the ball in Lowndes Square, and that all the men went so mad about? You knew her very well, though, didn't you?"

*Carlton* had never heard of the extreme intimacy be-

tween De Vigne and Alma, and never guessed on what dangerous ground he trod; Sabretasche had gone back in thought to that ball in Lowndes Square, where life and love had smiled so sweetly on him; I longed to check him, but I could not; even by the feeble lamplight I could see De Vigne's face grow crimson with the blood that leapt into it; then a gray, ashy paleness grew over it, all hue of color leaving his very lips. He had need then of his iron nerve.

"What of her?"

Carlton never noticed the chill stern tone of those brief words, hissed rather than spoken between his set teeth.

"What of her? Only that people say she levanted with that cursed fool, Vane Castleton. I pity her if she did! But she won't be the first woman idiot enough to have believed him. I fancy it's true, too, because as I came through Paris—where I know he is—on my way here, I saw her in a carriage in the Champs Elysées that was waiting at a door—a very dashing carriage, too. I didn't know her enough to speak to her, but I recognized her blue eyes in a second—it's a face you can't forget. I should have thought she'd been a nicer little thing than that, wouldn't you? But, bless you, women are all alike."

De Vigne sat quite still without moving a muscle, but I knew all he felt by the iron rigidity, the death-like pallor of his face, for I had seen it on his marriage-day. Happily for him, at that moment an orderly came to the door with a dispatch from headquarters to Sabretasche, and De Vigne, rising, bid us good night, and went out into the storm of pitiless, drenching, driving rain to seek his own tent.

Those two men had chatted over the tough turkey and the brandy, listening and laughing as though no curse were gnawing at their heart-strings; yet when he was alone

Sabretasche took from his breast a little miniature that, when his horse went down at Balaklava, had swung loose from his uniform by its gold cable-chain, and that he had stopped, even in the midst of that wild work, with the balls whistling around him, to put safely back in its resting-place—a miniature he had painted in the earliest days of their engagement, Violet's lovely face, half laughing, half tender, turned over her shoulder, and looking at him with those fond soft eyes, into which Heaven knew whether he might ever look again; and over the senseless ivory, which seemed to give her back to him in cruel and mocking semblance, Sabretasche bowed his head in bitterness unspeakable at the thought of that life-long barrier which stood ruthlessly between them. And De Vigne, whose iron nerve his comrades envied, and whose strength his enemies feared, groped his way through the storm and the darkness, insensible to the wild battle of wind and rain, and entering his own tent dizzily and unconsciously as though he had been suddenly stricken with blindness, threw himself forward on his narrow bed with one wild prayer from his breaking heart, "My God! my God! that I could die!"

The next morning a mail came in, (our own letters were lying in a heap at the tumble-down British post-office, where we posted them, often with very little hope that they would find their way to their destinations:) there were some from Violet, I think, by the flush that rose on the Colonel's impassive face as he received his epistles, and there were more than a dozen for De Vigne, some from men who really liked him, and with whom *hors de vue* was not always *hors d'esprit*; some from Leila Puffdoff, and women of her genre, who liked to write to one of the most distinguished men of the famous Light Brigade, to whom in days gone by they had used to make love. He read them *pour s'amuser*. The last he took up struck him keener than a

saber's thrust—it was in Alma Tressillian's handwriting. Twenty-four hours before how eagerly he would have seized it, hoping against hope for a reassurance of that love which alone made life of value to him; an explanation of that mystery which had robbed him so strangely and suddenly of her. But now, so skeptical of all good, so credulous of all evil, as he had grown, he never for a moment doubted, or dreamed of doubting, Carlton's story. Circumstantial evidence damned her, and with that mad haste which had cost him so much all his life long, without waiting or pausing, but allowing her no trust, no justice, not even a hearing, as he tore her letter open, for the moment with a wild and suffocating hope trembling at his heart; he flung it from him, with an oath and a groan, as he saw its heading, "No. 100, Champs Elysées, Paris." It was confirmation only too strong of Carlton's tale for him to doubt it. Going, as people often do from one extreme to the other, he who had been in his early youth far too trusting, was now in his manhood equally far too skeptical. Over-confidence had lost him his liberty; over-doubt now lost him his love. A folly one way had tied him to the Trefusis; a folly in another way now robbed him of Alma.

"He has deserted her, and she turns to me to befool me a second time!" was the mad thought with which he flung her letter from him. It was a cruel, an unjust, an ungenerous suspicion; though appearances might tell against her, he had no right to condemn her unheard; her lips had never lied to him; her eyes had never fallen beneath his most searching gaze; he had never heard from her an indelicate thought, a coarse word, a feeling that was not noble, high, and true; he had no right, unheard, to condemn her as the most artful, the most heartless, the most unprincipled actress and intrigante. How he *could*

think it, with the memory of her fond, frank affection; after the interchange of thought and opinion that had passed so long between them, I cannot imagine. His only excuse is, that he was well-nigh mad at the time, and knew not what he did while the agony of disbelief was on him; his grief was a wild delirium, from which his skepticism excluded every possibility of hope, and in which, in the first sting of agony at his betrayal, he sealed her letter again without reading it, and directed it back to her before his purpose should fail him. So, in our madness, we fling our happiness away! One letter still remained unread, indeed unnoticed, in the torrent of emotion awakened by the sight of Alma Tressillian's writing, which De Vigne never saw until he took it up to light his pipe late that night; then he opened it mechanically, glanced over it, saw the signature was "Your humble servant, Charles Raymond," the valet whom he had discharged for reading Alma's little note in Gloucester Place: "A begging letter, of course," thought De Vigne, too heart-sick with his own anguished thoughts to pay more heed to it, as he struck a match, held it in the flame, and lighted his meerschaum with it.

So we throw aside, as valueless cards, the honors life deals us in its uncertain whist.

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## II.

### THE GAZELLE IN THE TIGER'S FANGS.

VANE CASTLETON had gone mad about Alma. I do not mean that he loved her, as poor Curly did, well enough to marry her; nor as De Vigne, who would have thrown everything away to win her; but he was wild about her as very heartless men, cheres demoiselles, can be wild about

a face that has bewitched them. He was first of all fascinated by those "beaux yeux bleus;" then he was piqued by the wish to rival De Vigne, whom he disliked for some sharp sayings Granville had sometimes thrown carelessly at him; then, he was maddened by Alma's contemptuous treatment of him—certainly she *was* very provocative, with her eyes flashing angrily, and her soft, child-like lips curled in haughty yet petulant annoyance; and at last he swore to go there no more, to be treated *de haut en bas* by "that bewitching little devil," but to win her, *coûte que coûte*. She might hate him, he did not care for that; he did not think, with Montaigne, that a conquest, to be of value, must be *de bonne volonté* on the part of the captured; and if he had been in the East he would have sent his slaves, had her blindfolded, and kept her in his seraglio, without regard as to whether tears or smiles were the consequence. Not being able to act so summarily, he—feeling certain that he should never win her of her own free will, for Alma's dislike to him was undisguised, and long years before he had entered the lists with De Vigne and been cut down, as most men were in that sort of game, by Granville, and the House of Tiara having been, from time immemorial, as eccentric as Wharton and as unscrupulous as the Mohawks—he hit upon a plan seemingly more fitted for by-gone days than for our practical and prosaic age, where police prevent all escapades, and telegraphs anticipate all dénouements. But the more eccentric the thing the more pleasure was it to Castleton, who had something of the vanity of Sedley, and liked to set the town talking of his bad deeds, as other men liked to make it gossip of their great ones; he liked to out-Herod Herod, and his reputation for unscrupulous vice was as dear to him as though it had been the fame of the soldier or the statesman; he loved his mere approach to damn a woman's char-

acter à la Caligula, and if he could win Alma by some plot which would increase his notoriety—tant mieux !

On the morrow of De Vigne's declaration of love to her, Alma sat in her bay-window, waiting to catch the first faint music of his horse's hoofs upon the highway. She had done nothing that morning; her easel had lost all charm for her; Sylvo and Pauline obtained but little attention; and after she had filled the room with flowers to give him a brighter welcome, singing soft yet wild Italian barcarolles and love songs while she gathered them, till the goldfinches and the thrushes strained their throats to rival her, she threw herself down on the steps of the window, only guarded from the noontide sun by the chestnut-boughs, to watch for her lover's coming, full of that feverish, impassioned joy which can scarcely credit its own being. To Violet Molyneux happiness came as the meridian sunlight comes after the bright dawn, a deeper gold, indeed, but still only an intensifying of the sunrays that had gilded her cloudless life before. To Alma, accustomed to a solitary, thoughtful, and intellectual childhood with Boughton Tressillian, taught sorrow by his death, and trial by the almost destitution from which her talent alone had rescued her, leading a lonely and—but for her great gift, the elasticity of her spirits, and the resources of her own mind—a sad life for so young and lively a girl, it came like the burst of a Southern sunset, rising in all its deep-hued glories, its purple, and crimson, and golden splendor, passing the pomp of emperors; out of the funereal gloom of tempest-clouds, bathing all the earth that lay quivering from the death-grip of the storm in its own radiant and voluptuous light. At all times impressionable and enthusiastic—readily touched into happiness by the smallest ray of pleasure, as a sun-flower will turn at the first beam after a shower—the rapturous joy which had banished sleep,

but given her waking thoughts sweeter than any night-dreams, seemed to her now too great for reality. Under her gayety and child-like abandon there were vehement passions, the heritage of that Italian blood which Boughton Tressillian had said flowed in her veins; her warmth and impatience of nature were the traits of her character akin to De Vigne's, and those few hours with him yesterday had aroused all the impassioned affections which had been but half conscious of their existence, till told their own strength by the whispers of his love and the touch of his caresses.

Exquisitely happy as she was in memory and hope, she wanted him with her again to tell her it was no dream; she was restless, longing to hear his voice, counting the minutes till those dark and brilliant eyes should look once more into hers. When noon had passed, her restlessness grew into anxiety—she had unconsciously expected him quite early; with a union of child-like and lover-like impatience she had risen almost with her friends the birds, half hoping, I dare say, that he might surprise her at breakfast. Twenty times that morning had she run down to the gate, never heeding the soft summer rain that fell upon her golden hair, to look along the road for his horse and its rider. About one o'clock she stood leaning over the little wicket—a fair enough picture: a deep flush of anxiety was upon her cheeks, her blue eyes, under the shadow of her long lashes, were darkening with excitement and the thousand fluttering thoughts stirring in her heart; and with that longing to look well in his eyes which had its spring in something far nobler than coquetry, her dress was as graceful and picturesque as her simple but always tasteful toilette could afford. As she stood, the ring of hoofs rang upon the highway in the distance; the color deepened in her cheeks, her whole face



lighted up, her heart beat wildly against the wooden bar on which she rested. She was just opening the gate to run down the road to meet him, knowing how he would fling himself from the saddle at the first glimpse of her; she was lifting the latch, when the horse came nearer to her view; she saw it was not De Vigne, but Curly; not the one for whom her heart waited, but the one whom it rejected. With almost as much eagerness as De Vigne would have shown, he checked his horse at the little wicket before Alma could leave it, as she would fain have done. He threw himself off the saddle, and caught her hand:

"Alma! for Heaven's sake do not turn away from me."

She drew her hand impatiently away; she held it as De Vigne's—it was to be touched by no other. She was disappointed, too, and for the moment forgot anything else. Poor Curly, he came at an unlucky hour to plead his cause!

"Alma, is your resolution fully taken?" he said, catching her little hands once more in his too tightly for her to extricate them. "Listen to me but one word: I love you so well, so dearly; it is not possible for any other to love you as I do. Can you not give me one hope? Can you not feel some pity?"

Again she drew her hands away more gently; for her first irritation had passed, and she was too sweet a nature not to feel regret for the sorrow of which she was the cause. And a look of pain passed over her glad face as she answered him very softly:

"Why ask me? What I told you two days ago was the truth. I thank you very, very much for all your kindness. I wish to Heaven you cared nothing for me, for it grieves me to pain any one, but I could never have loved you."

"You would have done if you had not met him first,"

said Brandling, his fierce jealousy of De Vigne waking up and breaking bounds.

A brighter flush rose over her brow; she lifted her head with a proud, eager gladness upon it; she misunderstood him, and fancied De Vigne had told his friend of their mutual love.

"No," she said, with her pride in Granville's love surmounting her pity for Carly's. "No; if I had never known him I should have loved his ideal, of which he alone could have been the realization. You are mistaken; I could never have loved any other!"

The speech had a strange combination of girlish fondness and impassioned tenderness; it was a speech to fall chill as ice upon the heart of her listener: he who loved her so well, and, as is so often the fate of true affection, could win not one fond word in return.

Carly's hands grasped the rail of the gate; his fair and delicate face looked aged ten years with the marks of weary pain upon it.

"He has told you, then?" he said, abruptly.

He meant of De Vigne's marriage, she thought he meant of De Vigne's love, and answered, with a deeper blush,—

"Yes!"

"My God! and you will love him?"

"While my life lasts!"

She gloried in her adoration of De Vigne, and would no sooner have thought of evading acknowledgment of it than Chelonis or Eponina of evading exile or death. How woman-like she flung aside the love that would fain have crowned her with all honor, peace, and happiness, and chose, and would equally have chosen had she known her doom, the one that would cost her such bitter tears, such burning anguish!

"Heaven help me, then—and you!"

The two last words were too low for her to hear; but, touched by the suffering on his face, she stretched out the hands she had withdrawn.

"Colonel Brandling, I am grieved myself to grieve you. Forget me; you soon will find others much more worthy of you, and until you do at least forgive me!"

"Forgive you!" repeated Curly, "what would I not! but forget you I never can. I do not hope for that. Oh, Alma, my darling!" he cried, clasping her little hands close up to his heart, "would to Heaven you would listen to me. I would make you so happy: you will never be so happy with De Vigne. He does not love you unselfishly as I do; he will sacrifice you to himself; if you would but listen to me, all that life can give shall be yours—my name, my home, higher rank than I hold now. I will win you everything you desire, and with time I will make you love me."

At first she had listened to him in vague stupefaction, the thought never entered *her* head that any man should dare to ask her to forsake De Vigne; when she did comprehend his meaning she wrenched her hands away for the last time, her eyes flashing with anger, fiercer than any that had hitherto been roused in her young heart, passion of another sort crimsoning her brow.

"Do you dare to insult me with such words? Do you venture to suppose that any living man could ever make me faithless to him? Girl as I am, I tell you that you speak most falsely if you say that he does not love me generously, nobly, and unselfishly, with a love of which I can never be worthy. You are a true friend indeed, to come and slander him in his absence; you would not dare to try and rival him with such coward words if he were present. *He* would have scorned to take such mean advantage over *you*!"

With those vehement words, natural and right in her, but how bitter to him! Alma swept from him with a dignity of which those who only knew her in her gay and girlish moods would hardly have thought her capable, and turned in to her bay-windows, her face full of indignation at what she thought—ignorant of the fact that prompted poor Curly's unwise words—such insult and such treachery to her idolized lover. His hands grasped the gate-bar till the rusty nails that were in the wood forced themselves through his gloves into the flesh, and watched her till the last gleam of her golden hair had vanished from his sight. Then he threw himself across his saddle, and galloped down the road amid the heavy rain that now began to fall from the gathering clouds, the ring of the hoofs growing fainter on Alma's ear as she listened for those that should grow nearer and nearer till they should bring De Vigne to her side. She had no thought for Curly; I think she would have had more if she had known that never again on earth would she look upon that fair, fond face, that would so soon lie turned upward to the pitiless sky, unconscious and calm amid the roar of musketry and the glare of a captured citadel.

She threw herself down upon a couch, excited still with the glow of indignation that Curly's words had roused in her. Impetuous always, though sweet tempered, she was like a little lioness at any imputation on De Vigne; whether he had been right or wrong she would have flung herself headlong into his defense, and, had she seen any faults in her idol, she would have died before she let another breathe them. Scarcely had the gallop of Curly's horse ceased to mingle with the fall of the rain-drops and the rustle of the chestnut-leaves, when the roll of carriage-wheels broke on her ear. She started up wild with delight—this time she

felt sure it was he—and even Pauline screamed the name she had caught from Alma, “Sir Folko! Sir Folko!”

But the girl’s joyous heart fell with a dead weight upon it when she saw a hired brougham standing at her gate. She knew that if De Vigne ever drove down, which was but seldom, as he at all times preferred being in saddle, he drove in one of his own carriages with his servants. Out of the brougham came a lady, tall, stately, superbly dressed, gathering her rich skirts round with one hand as she came up the gravel path. Alma watched her with irritation and no sort of interest; she did not know her, and she supposed she was some stranger called to look at her pictures—since her Louis Dix-sept had been exhibited at the Water-Colors she had had many such visitors. The lady turned, of course, to the side of the house to approach the hall door, and Alma lay quiet on her couch, stroking Pauline’s scarlet crest, while the bird reiterated its cry, “Sir Folko! Sir Folko!”

She rose and bowed as her visitor entered,\*and looked at her steadily with her upraised blue eyes—with a trick Alma had of studying every new physiognomy that came before her, forming her likes and dislikes thereupon; rapidly, indeed, but nevertheless almost always unerringly. The present survey displeased her, as her guest slightly bent her stately head. They were a strange contrast, certainly. The woman tall, her figure very full, too full for beauty; her features fine and sharp, with artistic yet deep-hued rouge upon her cheeks, and Oriental tinting round her bold black eyes; her raven hair turned off à l’impératrice,—a repulsive, harsh, though undeniably handsome face, her attire splendid, her jewels glittering, yet with some indefinable want of the *lady* upon her: the girl small, slight, with native grace and aristocracy in all her movements; with the best of all loveliness, the beauty of intellect, re-

finement, vivacity; with her light girlish dress, her general air of mingled childlikeness, intelligence, and fascination.

Alma rolled a chair toward her, seated herself again, and looked a mute inquiry as to her visitor's errand. The lady's fierce, bold eyes were fixed upon her in curious scrutiny; she seemed a woman of the world, yet she appeared at a loss how to explain her call; she played with the fringe of her parasol as she said, "Have I the pleasure of seeing Miss Tressillian?"

Alma bent her head.

She still toyed uneasily with the long fringe as she went on, never relaxing her gaze at Alma:

"May I inquire, too, whether you are acquainted with Major De Vigne?"

At the abrupt mention of the name so dear to her, the blush that yesterday De Vigne had loved to call up by his whispered words rose in Alma's face; again she bowed in silence.

"You are very intimate with him—much interested in him, are you not?"

Alma rose, her slight figure haughtily erect, her eyes sufficiently indicative of resentment at her visitor's unceremonious intrusion:

"Pardon me, madam, if I inquire by what title you venture to intrude such questions upon me?"

"My title is clear enough," answered her guest, with a certain sardonic smile, which did not escape Alma's quick perception, and increased her distrust of her interrogator. "Perhaps you may guess it when I ask you but one more question: Are you aware that Major De Vigne is a married man?"

For a moment the cruel abruptness of the question sent back the blood with a deadly chill to Alma's heart, and her companion's bold, harsh eyes watched with infinite amuse-

ment the quiver of anguish that passed over her bright young face at the mere thought. But it was only for a moment; the next Alma smiled at the idea, as if Sir Folko would conceal anything from her—above all, conceal *that*! Her rapid instincts made her mistrust and dislike this woman; she guessed it was some one who, having a grudge against De Vigne, had tried this clumsy method to injure him, and her clear, fearless eyes flashed contemptuous anger on her questioner; she deigned no answer to the inquiry.

"Major De Vigne is my friend. I allow no stranger to mention his name to me except with the respect it deserves. I am quite at a loss to conceive why you should trouble yourself to insult me with these unwarranted interrogations. You will excuse me if I say that I am much engaged just now, and should be glad to be left alone."

She bowed as she spoke, and moved across the room to the bell, but her visitor would not take the hint, however unmistakable; she sat still, leaning back in her chair playing with her parasol, probably puzzled whether or no the Little Tressillian was aware of her lover's marriage. High-couraged and thoroughly game as Alma was, she felt a repugnance to this woman—a certain vague fear of her, and dislike to being alone with her—and wished, how fervently, that Granville would but come. Unconscious of who was endeavoring to pour poison into Alma's ear, he was leading his troop in sections of threes across Wormwood Scrubbs; even while he gave the word of command, his heart beating high with the memory of the fond and earnest words of love that but a few hours before he had heard, and in so few hours more should hear again.

Her visitor rose too, and took a different tone, fixing her black eyes, in whose bold stare spoke such a dark past and such an unscrupulous character, on those whose dark-blue depths shone clear with frankness, fearlessness, and youth.

"You take too high a tone, young girl; if you do not know of his marriage, you are to be pitied; if you do, you are to be blamed indeed; and if you have any shadow of right feeling left in you, you will be bowed down with shame before me, and will never, out of both regard for yourself and justice to me, see Granville De Vigne again, when I tell you that *I* am his wife!"

"His wife!" With ashy lips poor little Alma re-echoed the words, which came to her with but a vague significance, yet with a chill of horror. His wife!—that coarse, cruel-eyed woman, with her bold stare, and her gorgeous dress, which yet could not give her the stamp of birth; for Time had not passed wholly lightly on the Trefusis, and now that the carnation in her cheeks had ceased to be from nature, and her form, always Juno-like, had now grown far too full for symmetry, handsome as she still was, there was more trace of the Frestonhill's milliner in her than of the varnish she had adopted from the Parisiennes, and at thirty-seven the Trefusis had grown—vulgar! That woman his wife! Chill and horrible as the words had once sounded in her ear, Alma, true to her glowing faith in, and reverence of, De Vigne, could have laughed at the mere thought. That woman his wife!—his! when but a few hours before he had called her his love, his darling, his own little Alma, and kissed her, when she spoke to him of their sweet future together! She knew it was a plot against him; she would not join in it by lending ear to it. Even had it been true, no lips but his should have told her; but it was not true—it could not be. *He* could never have loved that woman—splendid though she might have been in her early youth—with her rouged cheeks, her tinted eyelids, her cruel eyes, her cold, harsh voice, her style, which struck on the Little Tressillian's senses as something so wholly unlike the refinement, the intellect,



the delicacy which seemed to please him now. Alma did not remember that a man's first love is invariably the antipodes of his last!

"You his wife!" she repeated, with a contempt in the curl of her lips which excited the savage nature of her listener, as the Trefusis's words and tone had excited the slumbering fire of Alma's character. "You *his* wife? Before pretending to such a title, you should first have learnt the semblance of a lady to uphold you in the assumption of your rôle. Your impertinence in addressing me I shall not honor by resenting; but your ill-done plot, I must tell you, will scarcely pass current with me."

She spoke haughtily and impatiently, anger and disdain flashing from her expressive face, which never cared to attempt concealment of any thought passing through her mind.

"Plot!" repeated the Trefusis, with a snarl on her lips like a hound catching hold of its prey, her savage temper working up, not warmly, as De Vigne's and Alma's passion did when roused, but coldly and cruelly. "You think it a plot, young lady? or do you only say so to brazen it out before a woman you have foully wronged? If it be a plot, what say you then to that?"

Not letting go her hold upon it, she held before Alma's eyes the certificate of her marriage.

"Read it!"

Alma, who had never seen a document of the kind, saw only a printed paper, and put it aside with a haughty gesture; she would have none of this woman's enforced confidences. But the Trefusis caught her little delicate wrist in the hard grasp of the large hand that years before Sabretasche had noticed, and held the certificate so that Alma could not choose but see the two names, Granville De Vigne and Constance Lucy Trefusis, with the prolix

preamble with which his Grace of Canterbury so graciously permits an Englishman to wed.

Alma's face grew white, even to her lips; her eyes black, as they were sure to do under strong excitement; for an instant her heart stopped with a dull throb of anguish and horror, then, true to her allegiance, refused, even in the face of proof, the doubt that would dishonor him; no thought that was treachery to her lover should dwell in her mind, no stranger should whisper of him in his absence to her! She threw off the Trefusis's hand as though it had been the gripe of an adder's fangs.

"Leave my presence this instant," she said, fiercely, her soft eyes flashing like dark-blue steel in the sunlight; "it is useless to seek to injure him with me."

As she spoke she rang the bell, and so loudly that the single servant of the house responded to the summons instantly; Alma bowed her head with the stately grace of an empress signing to her household, "Show this lady to the door."

For once in her life the Trefusis was baffled; she knew not how to play her next card, uncertain as to whether or no Alma was aware of her marriage to De Vigne, judging, of the two, that she was—for of a love as true, a faith as honorable as the Little Tressillian's, she never could even have imagined. She had hoped to find a weak and timorous young girl, whom her dignity would awe and her story overwhelm, but she was baffled, cheated of her second revenge upon De Vigne. She turned once more to Alma, with her devil's sneer upon her fine bold features:

"Excuse me, Miss Tressillian, for my very misplaced pity for you. I fancied you a young and orphaned girl, whom knowledge of the truth might warn from an evil course; I regret to find one on whom all warnings are thrown away, and who gives insult where she should ask for pardon. No

other motive than pity for you prompted my call. I have been too often the victim of Major De Vigne's inconstancy for it to have any longer power to wound me."

Then the woman, whom Church and Law would have termed his wife, swept from the room, and the girl, whom Love and Nature would have declared his wife, was left once more to her solitude. In that solitude poor little Alma's high-strung nerves gave way; while her sword and her shield were wanted she had done battle for him gallantly, but now they were no longer needed her courage forsook her, and she lay on the couch sobbing bitterly. Tears had always been very rare with her, but of late they had found their way much oftener to the eyes which should have been as shadowless as the deep Southern skies, whose hue they took; with passion, all other floodgates of the heart are loosed. Her wild ecstasy of rapture was certain to have its reaction; vehement joys, too, often pay their own price—above all, with natures that feel both too keenly! She did not credit what the Trefusis had told her; her own quick perception, true in its deduction, though here not true in fact, knew that no really injured wife would have taken the tone of her visitor, nor so undignified a means of making her wrongs and her title known; there was something false, coarse, cruel in the Trefusis, which struck at once on her delicate senses; she felt sure it was a plot against him, the marriage certificate a forgery; she had read of women who had taken similar revenge upon men. "So many must have loved him," thought poor little Alma, "and so many, therefore, will hate me as I should hate any one who took him away from me." So she reasoned, with that loyal love which, truer than the love that is fabled as *blind*, if it see a stain on its idol will veil it from all eyes, even from its own. She did not, for an instant, believe what the Trefusis had

told her; she was sure her Sir Folko would never have concealed it from her—he would never have deceived her. Still it had left upon her a sort of vague dull weight; she felt afraid, she scarcely knew of what, a terror lest her new-won joys should leave her as suddenly as they had come to her; she longed for her lover to be with her once more, to feel him take her in his arms again, and hear him tell her he was all her own; her thirst for De Vigne's presence became almost unbearable: she would have given years of her young life to look in his eyes again, and hear his voice whisper, as it had done the night before, those love-vows which had awoken all the slumbering passions of her nature.

Once more the roll of carriage-wheels interrupted the ceaseless fall of the heavy rain. Alma started up; dashing the tears from her flushed cheeks, joy beaming again on her changing face, every sense strained to see if at last it was he. But that she would not welcome him with tears she could have wept with delight when she saw on the carriage-box a man whom she knew to be his servant, his own valet Raymond, whom she remembered so well because he had brought her Pauline, and the flowers that had made De Vigne's first gift; *now* she knew his master must be there!

Poor little Alma! She had suffered a good deal in her brief life, but she had never known anything like the terror which, crowding the pain of hours into a single minute, laid its leaden hand upon her when she saw not De Vigne, but his servant alone approach.

"Oh my God! what has happened? He is ill!" she uttered, unconsciously, her nerves unstrung by her interview with the Trefusis; her imagination seized on all the evils that could have befallen one whom she loved so well,

that she feared happiness with him was too much rapture to be given to her.

Her face kept changing from a crimson flush to a lifeless white during the few moments while the man was going round to the entrance and being admitted. She stood with her hands clinched in the effort to repress the emotion she could not show to him. As Raymond approached her, with the silken humility which characterized that prize valet, in contradistinction to the pomposity and grandeur affected by his class, he seemed, for that impassive individual, hurried and anxious.

"Madam," he began, with one of the reverential salaams which would have qualified him to be groom of the chamber, "in riding home last evening, Major De Vigne was thrown from his horse."

"Good God! is he hurt?"

Not the servant's presence could restrain the agony spoken in those few brief words, or rather she had utterly forgotten his presence.

"Yes he is," said Raymond, hesitatingly. "The hurt might not perhaps be so severe, but inflammation, and consequently fever, have set in. He is, of course, unable to move. He is at times unconscious, and at those times he is constantly speaking of you, Miss Tressillian; muttering your name, and calling you to come to him so incessantly, that the surgeon told me, if I knew who the lady was that the Major meant, to fetch her, for that his life depended on his being kept as calm as possible. So, madam, I ventured to come and inform you. I could not tell what to do. I hope I have done right. I brought the carriage in case you might be kind enough to come——"

Poor little Alma! how the light died out of the face so radiant but a short time before! She was white as a

statue, save for the blue veins which stood out upon her temples and her hands. She gave one low, deep sob, tears would not now come to her relief; then she turned her eyes with all their pitiable anguish upon the valet, and her throat was hoarse and dry as after a long illness, when she answered him incoherently :

“ Right—quite right. I shall be ready in a moment.”

Alma's love was infinitely too true, eager, and active, to stand still and weep while anything could be done for him. She never paused to reason or reflect; all she thought of was De Vigne suffering, perhaps in danger. He wanted her, that was enough! She ran up stairs, her heart suffocated with the sobs to which she would not give way while he needed nerve and action to aid him. She took her little black hat, threw a large cloak over her dress, and was beside the carriage in an instant.

“ The Major was riding toward Windsor, madam, so he is now at the nearest house to the place where Berwick threw him. It is many miles from here,” said Raymond, as he opened the door.

Alma bent her head; her thoughts were too fully centered on De Vigne to notice that the man had said on his entrance that Granville was riding home, now that he had been going across to Windsor; or to remark the improbability of De Vigne's having gone so far the previous night. The door was shut, Raymond got upon the box, and the brougham rolled away, bearing Alma from St. Crucis.

The drive seemed interminable through the heavy rain, which fell without cessation. Alma heeded neither roads nor weather; her heart was with her lover, chained on a bed of suffering, asking for her to soothe his pain, thinking of her even when his mind had wandered from all else, with only hirelings around his bed to calm his suffering, to watch his fevered sleep, to hold the cool draught to his

burning lips, to push the hair off his heated brow, to do all that Alma in her great love longed and yearned to do for him, and would have done more fondly, more unflaggingly, more tenderly, than any other. All her thoughts were with her lover, and every moment that kept her from him seemed an eternity. She could not remember how far Windsor was from Richmond; she knew little or nothing of London or its environs, indeed of England itself, so secluded had her life been since she quitted Lorave; but the drive seemed interminable, in the heavy drenching rain that rattled on the carriage-top and poured off the windows. So horrible grew the long, dreary drive, through roads so strange to her, with her fear and anxiety for her lover, and the ceaseless sigh and sob of the drenching rain, that Alma, impressionable as most enthusiastic natures are, became what she very rarely was, nervous and fearful, excited to a vague and heavy dread of some approaching evil. All her radiant joy of the morning had died away. Curly's words, the Trefasis's intrusion, the news of De Vigne's accident, all combined together, had weighed upon her sensitive and excitable nature with a gloom and a dread that she could not shake off or reason away. That dreary, solitary drive! how long it seemed; how horrible the gray, dark rain, the ceaseless roll of the wheels, the wearisome, unfamiliar road! Poor little Alma, as if conscious of her doom, cowered down in a corner of the carriage, like a young child fearful of the dark, looking back on the sweet past of yesterday, as, beside the grave of one they have loved, men look back on the time when the dead lips were smiling and the closed eyes were bright.

The carriage stopped at last on the outskirts of Windsor, rolled through iron scroll gates under some dripping larch-trees, through small grounds very ill kept and untidy, with long grass and flowers run wild, and a statue or two

moss-grown, grim, and broken; the very aspect of the place struck a fresh chill into Alma's heart, and nothing in the house itself reassured her. It was a cross between an old country-house and a lorette's or actress's St. John's-wood villa, and had an untidy, dissipated, unpleasant look about it—at least to her, long used to the brilliant sunlight of Lorave, and since accustomed to her old nurse's bright, cleanly, and picturesque farm-house. It seemed a house that might have seen dark stories and painful scenes, smothered from the light of justice, between those irregular and dirty walls. The carriage stopped again before a low side-door, and Alma thought little of the house—only of the one who had sought its temporary asylum. She sprang from the brougham the instant Raymond let down the steps.

"Where is your master?"

"I will take you to him, madam, if you will have the kindness to follow me," said that silky valet.

Alma bent her head in acquiescence, and followed him through several crooked passages and tortuous corridors, through which she could not have found her way back unaided; at last he threw open the door of a room, and stood back for her to enter. It was now nearly nine o'clock; the dense clouds and drenching rain had made it as dark in the open country as though it were fully night; and in this chamber, of which the curtains before the windows at the far end were drawn, Alma could see nothing save the indistinct outline of a table and some chairs near her. She turned hastily to Raymond:

"Is Major De Vigne——"

But the valet had withdrawn, closing the door behind her, and she heard a sharp click like the turning of a key in a lock. Then a deadly agony of fear came upon her, and she trembled from head to foot; horrid sights, sounds,



thoughts, seemed to hover round her; she had had from infancy a strange, vague terror of being alone in darkness, and she stretched out her hands with a pitiful cry:

"Sir Folko—Granville—oh! where are you?"

In answer to her call a man's form drew near, indistinct in the less than *demi-lumière*, and in her ear a man's voice whispered:

"My love; my beautiful, my idolized Alma, there is one here who loves you dearer than him you call. If I have erred in bringing you here, pardon at least a fault of too much love."

A shriek of loathing, despair, horror, and anguish burst from Alma's lips, ringing shrill and loud through the darkened room, as she knew the speaker to be Vane Castleton. She struggled from his grasp so fiercely that he was forced to let her go, and mastering her terror with the courage that was planted side by side in her nature with so much that was poetic and susceptible, she turned on to him coldly and haughtily, as she had spoken to the *Trefusis*:

"Lord Vane, what do you think to gain by daring to insult me thus? Major De Vigne's servant brought me here to see his master, who was dangerously hurt. I desire you to leave me, or, if this be your house, and you have one trace of a gentleman's honor left in you, to tell me at once where I may find my friend."

Castleton would have laughed outright at the little fool's simplicity, but he was willing to win her by gentle means if he could, perhaps, for there are few men entirely blunted and inured to shame; he scarcely relished the fiery scorn of those large blue eyes that flashed upon him in the twilight.

"Do not be so severe upon me," he said, softly. "Surely *one so gentle* to all others may pardon an offense born

from a passion of which she of all others should show some pity. I would have told you yesterday how madly I love you—and my love is no cold English fancy, Alma—I love you, my beautiful, idolized, divine little angel; and my love has driven me perhaps to error, but an error such as women should surely pardon.”

“Do not touch me!” cried Alma, fiercely, as he stretched out his arm again toward the delicate form that he could crush in his grasp as a tiger’s fangs a young gazelle. “Your words are odious to me, your love pollution, your presence hateful. Insult me no more, but answer me, yes or no, where is Major De Vigne?”

“De Vigne? I do not know. He is with his wife; he cannot hear you, and would not help you if he did.”

“It is a lie!” moaned Alma, almost delirious with fear and passion. “He has no wife; and if he cannot help me now he will revenge me before long for all your dastard insults.”

“How will he hear of them, pretty one?” laughed Castleton. “Do you think, now I have you; I shall let you go again? I have hardly caged my bird only to let her fly. We shall clip your wings, loveliest, till you like your captivity too well to try and free yourself. You are mine now, Alma; you shall never be De Vigne’s.”

“I shall never be yours—dastard!—coward!” gasped Alma, striking him with her clinched fingers. Involuntarily he loosened his hold one moment; that moment was enough for her; she wrenched herself from him, flew across the room, tore aside the curtain of one of the windows;—by good fortune it was open, and, without heeding what height she might fall, leaped from its low sill on to the ground without. The window was five feet off the ground-lawn below, but, happily for her, there lay just where she alighted a large heap of cut grass—all that had been

mown off the turf that morning having been gathered together just beneath the window. Its yielding softness broke her fall, but she lay stunned for a moment, till Castleton's voice from the chamber made her spring to her feet, like a hare that has lain down panting to rest a moment in its run for life, and starts off again, with every nerve quivering and every sense stretched, at the bay of the hounds in pursuit. She sprung to her feet, and ran with all the fleetness to which her terror of Castleton's chase could urge her feet, along the lawn. The grounds were a labyrinth to her, the light was dim and dusky, the rain still fell in torrents, but Alma's single thought was to get away from that horrible house to which she had been lured for such a horrible fate. She fled across the lawn, and through a grove of young firs, taking the first path that presented itself; the road through the plantation led her on about a quarter of a mile; she flew over the dank wet turf with the speed of a hunted antelope, yet to her, with the dread of pursuit upon her, thinking every moment she heard steps behind her, feeling every instant in imagination the grasp of her hated lover and foe, it seemed as though leaden weights were on her ankles, and each step she took seemed to take her a hundred steps backward. At the end of the plantation was a staken-bound fence, and a high gate, with spikes on its top rail. Her heart grew sick with terror: if she turned back she would fall into Castleton's grasp as surely as a fox that doubles from a wall falls a victim to the pack. She knew he would pursue her; to retrace her steps would be to meet him, and Alma knew him well enough to guess what mercy she would find at his hands. An old man, gathering up his tools after thinning the trees and loosening the earth round their roots, was near the gate, and to him Alma rushed:

"Let me through! let me through, for God's sake!" she

gasped, her fingers clinching on his arm, the wild terror on her face telling her story without words.

The old peasant, a hard-featured, kindly-eyed old man, looked at her in amazement.

"Poor bonny child, where would you go?"

"Let me through quick—quick, for the love of Heaven!" whispered Alma, panting with her breathless race.

Without another question the woodsman unlocked the gate and let her pass; she flew through it with a murmured "God reward you!" and as he locked the padlock after her, and took up his axe and spade, he muttered to his own thoughts, "Castleton would slay me alive if he could for that; but I don't care—she's too bonnie a birdie for such an evil cage."

Once through the gate, she found herself where two cross-roads met; ignorant which led back to London, she took the one on her right and ran on, every step she took plunging her into the heavy and sloppy mud left by the continuous rain in the afternoon, the thick drops of the shower, that still fell fast and heavily, falling on her golden hair and soaking through her muslin dress, for both her hat and cloak had fallen off in the struggle with Castleton; her heart beating to suffocation, her delicate limbs, so unused to all fatigue or exertion, already beginning to fail her, every nerve on the rack in the dread horror of pursuit, strained to tension to catch the sound she dreaded so intensely, that not a bough cracked in the wind or a rain-drop splashed in the puddles as she passed but she thought it was Castleton or his emissaries chasing her to carry her back to that horrible house. On and on she ran, her gold hair loosened and streaming behind her, heavy and dank with water, her thin boots soaked and clogged with the weight of the mud gathered fresh with every step, her strength failing her, and every sinew throbbing, cracking,

aching with that merciless race from what was worse than death. At last she could run no longer; with all her terror to push her on, and all her spirit, which was ever much greater than her strength, Nature would do no more, and rebelled against the unnatural strain upon her powers. She could not run, but she walked on and on, at first rapidly, halting every now and then for breath, then toiling wearily, ready to sink down on the wet, cold earth, murmuring every now and then De Vigne's name, or whispering a prayer to God. On she still went, she knew not where, only away, away, away forever from Vane Castle-ton. Poor little Alma, so tenderly nurtured, so delicately bred, sensitive as a hot-house flower, the child of art, of love, of refinement, with her high-wrought imagination, her delicate mould of form and thought, her child-like fear of solitude in darkness! She must have suffered in that cruel flight more than we, with men's strength and power of endurance and of self-defense, can ever guess. On and on she dragged her weary way, till the dusky haze of rain and fog deepened to the softer gray of night, and the storm ceased and the crescent moon came out over the grand old trees of Windsor Forest. She had toiled on till she had reached the outskirts of the royal park, and as the moonlight shivered on their gaunt boughs and played on their wet leaves, and the dark hollows of their massive trunks stood out in cavernous gloom, and the summer winds sighed and moaned through the dim forest glades, Alma stopped, powerless to stir again, and a deadly terror of something vague and unknown crept upon her, for, strong as her clear reason was with the daylight of intellect and science, her brain was strongly creative, her nerves exquisitely tender, her mind steeped in poetry, romance, and out-of-the-world lore even from her childhood, when *she had believed* in fairies because Shakspeare and Milton

wrote of them. A deadly terror came upon her; a hundred wild stories that she would have laughed at at another hour rose in chaos before her mind, bewildered already with the horrors of the past day. She was afraid to be alone with that vast silent forest, those cold, solemn stars; she was afraid of the night, of the stillness, of the solitude; she who but so few hours before had been gathered to De Vigne's heart and sheltered in his arms, there, as she had thought, to find asylum all her life. She was afraid; a cold trembling seized her, she looked wildly up at those great sighing trees waving their gaunt arms and silver foliage in the moonlight; no sound in the hushed evening air but the hooting of an owl or the clash of the horns of fighting stags. One sob rose in her throat, De Vigne's name rang through the quiet woodlands and up to the dark skies, then she fell forward almost insensible on the tangled moss, wet and cold with the rain of the past day, her long bright hair trailing on the grass, her fair white brow lying on the damp and dirty earth, her little hands clinched on the gnarled roots of a beech-tree that had stood in its place for centuries past, while race after race of immortals, with thought and brain, passion and suffering, had passed away unheeded to their graves. There she lay; and as if in pity for this fair, fragile, human thing, the summer winds sighed softly over her, and touched her brow with soft caresses as they played among her wet and golden curls. She had no power to move, to stir even a limb; terror, fatigue, that horrible and breathless race, that terrible run through the pitiless storm, had almost beaten all the young life out of her. Nature could do no more; the spirit could no longer bear up against the suffering of the body; where she had fallen she lay, broken and worn out; if Castleton had been upon her she could not have risen or dragged herself one other step. She was but half

conscious; wild thoughts, vague horrors, shapes, and sights and sounds, indistinct with the unembodied terrors of night-dreams, danced at times before her closed eyes, and hovered on the borders of her brain; still she lay there, powerless to move from the phantasms of her mind, equally powerless to repel them with her will. All volition was gone; terror and bodily fatigue had done their work, till the mind itself at last succumbed, outwearied, and a heavy, dreamless sleep stole on her, the sleep of nature utterly worn out. There she lay on the cold, dank moss, the dark brushwood waving over her, above her the silent vault of heaven, with its mysterious worlds revolving in their spheres, while the great boughs of the forest stirred with a mournful rhythm, and through their silent glades moved with melancholy sigh and measure, the spirit of the summer wind.

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## PART THE TWENTY-FIRST.

### I.

#### HOW LITTLE ALMA HOVERED BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

THE summer morning dawned sweetly on the grand old trees that were shaking the dew off their glossy leaves, and lifting their boughs to the sunshine; the herds of deer rose from their fern couches, and trooped down to the pools for their morning drink; the subtle, delicious fragrance of the dawn rose up from the wet grass that sparkled in the light after the storm of the past day, and from the deep dells, and shadowy glades, and sunny knolls of the Royal Forest rose a soft morning hymn of joy. One of the rangers was going home to his cottage for

breakfast, a white-haired old man, who had lived in the stately woodlands till he loved them almost as men love their own ancestral homes, and knew every legend that had haunted those royal glades since the days when Edward of York led his brilliant hunting-train in the midsummer sheen, and the eighth Tudor listened for the cannon boom that told him his own fair wife and Thomas Wynn's false love was murdered. He was going to his home for breakfast, when he caught sight of something gleaming white among the brushwood on the outskirts of the forest, and drawing nearer, to his astonishment beheld Alma as she slept. He was going to awaken her somewhat roughly, perhaps, but something in her attitude touched him, and as he stooped over her and marked the fine texture of the dress, soaked through with mud and rain, her delicate hands with their white skin and blue veins, her face, so pale, so youthful, so refined, with the circles under the eyes dark as the lashes resting on them, and the parted lips, through which every breath came with such feverish and painful effort, he shrank involuntarily from touching harshly what seemed so fragile and so helpless.

He stooped over her, perplexed and worried; he did not like to leave her; he did not like to move her.

"Poor pretty child!" he muttered, drawing her thick golden hair through his rough fingers, and feeling her hand, which burnt like fire. "Who's sent her out to such a bed, I wonder? If she's been lying out all night, she's caught her death of cold. I should like to take her home, poor young thing; but what would the old woman say?"

The worthy man, being a trifle henpecked, paused at this view of the question; his charity halting before the dread of another's condemnation of it, as charity in the



great world shrinks and hides her head before the dread of the "que dira-t-on !" He wavered ; he could not leave her there ; he was afraid, poor fellow, to take her home, lest a hissing voice should condemn his folly, and a shrew's vituperations reward him for his Samaritanism. He wavered still, while his dog, with the true instinct and ready kindness with which dumb animals so often shame their owners, began to lick those little burning hands with his great rough tongue, in honest well-meaning to do good and to offer what help lay in his power.

As his master wavered, ashamed to leave, afraid to take her with him, a lady and two little girls, a governess and her pupils, walking before their breakfast, drew near, too. The keeper knew them, and looked up as they approached, for they were astonished as well as he at this girlish figure with the white dress and golden hair lying down on the dark dank moss.

"Dear me, Reuben—dear me, what is this?" asked the governess, while the children's eyes grew round and bright with wonder and pleasure at seeing something strange to tell when they reached home.

"It's a woman, ma'am," responded the keeper, literally, while the lady drew near a little cautiously and a little frightened ; for, though a good-hearted, gentle creature, she *was* a woman, and by no means exempt from the peculiar theories of her sex, and no lady, we know, will look at another, however in distress or want, unless she knows she is "proper" for her own pure eyes to rest upon.

"It's a woman," went on Reuben, "or rather a girl, ma'am, for she's only a bit of a thing. She looks like a lady, too, ma'am—leastways her face and her hands do—and her dress is like them bits of cobwebs that fine ladies wear, that are no good at all for wind and weather. If *she's* been lying here all night, sure she'll die of cold afore

long, though it is summer, to be sure; but by the look on her, I fear she's been out in all the rain last evening. She's only asleep now, ma'am, though she do look like a corpse, and I don't know what to do with her, ma'am, for you see it ain't a little thing for poor people like us to get an invalid into our house for, maybe, two or three months, and a long doctor's bill, and perhaps in the end nothing to pay it with; and as for the work-house——"

"Couldn't we take her home with us? I am sure mamma would let us. Don't you think we might, Miss Russell?" asked the younger girl, a bright-faced child of ten or eleven.

"Hush, Cecy! Don't be silly! How could we take a person home that we know nothing about? She can't be a very *nice* person you are sure, Cecy, or she wouldn't be out here all alone," said her elder sister, reprovingly, who had already learnt her little lesson in the world's back-reading of charity, and had already a special little jury of her own for haranguing and converting people according to the practices she saw around her.

"Let me look at her, poor young creature. You were quite right, Cecy dear, to be kind to people, though you could never do such a thing without asking your mamma; and you should not be so quick to condemn others, Arabella; it is not doing as you would be done by, my love. Let me look at this poor young thing!" said the governess, her compassion getting the better of her prudence. She stooped over the figure that lay so motionless amid all their speculations upon her, turned her face gently toward the light, and, as the sun-rays fell upon it, cried out in bitter horror, "Alma! my poor little Alma! How can she have come here?" And, to the children's wonder, their governess sank on her knees by the girl, pushing

the damp hair off her forehead, kissing her pale cheek, and almost weeping over her in her astonishment and her sorrow.

"Do you know her, ma'am?" asked the keeper. "Do you know her, Miss Russell?" cried the children, in shrill chorus of surprise and curiosity. The poor lady could not answer them at first; she was speechless with bewilderment to find her darling Alma lying here sleeping, with the damp earth for her pillow, out here under the morning skies, with nothing to shelter her from night dew or noontide sun, as lonely, as wretched, as homeless as the most abject outcast flying from his life and banned from every human habitation.

"Yes, Reuben—yes, my dears—I know her well, indeed, poor darling!" she answered them at last, hurriedly and incoherently, and trembling with the sudden shock and her uncertainty how in the world to act. "She is Alma Tressillian—my dear little Alma. Heaven only knows how she can have come here! What can have happened to her—what can have driven her all this distance from her home?"

"Is this Miss Tressillian you used to tell us about?" asked Cecy, eagerly.

"I thought all your pupils had been *ladies*, Miss Russell?" asked Arabella, standing aloof, with a curl on her lip.

But Miss Russell for once heard nothing either of them said; she was trying to wake Alma from the slumber that, save for her labored breathings, seemed the very counterfeit of death. Whether she woke or not she could not tell; a heavy, struggling sigh heaved her chest; she tried to turn, but had no power; then her eyes unclosed, but there was no consciousness in them; the lids dropped again immediately; a shiver as of icy cold ran through her; she lay still, motionless as the dead.

"What can we do with her?" cried poor Miss Russell, half beside herself with grief for the girl, and powerlessness to aid her, for in her own home she was but a dependent, and her employer, a rector, in the constant habit of dinning charity and its duties into the ears of his "flock," would, she knew, resent even more than Reuben's wife the introduction into his house of a person ill and in need who could not repay him with *éclat* for his Christianity. "What shall we do?" cried the poor lady. "She will die, poor dear child, if she is half an hour longer without medical aid. Poor little darling, what can ever have brought her to this——"

"I'll take her to our house," said Reuben, decided at last. "Since you know her, ma'am, that'll be everything to my missis."

"Do, do," assented the governess, eagerly; she would have done anything for her darling Alma that anybody could have suggested, no matter how much to her own hinderance, but by nature she was nervous, timid, and undecided. "Do, Reuben, take her at once, and pray move her tenderly. I must see the Miss Seymours home, but I shall be at your cottage as soon as you are. Take her up gently. My poor little darling!"

Reuben lifted the girl in his arms, those sturdy, rough arms, so little used to such a load, and laid the golden head with no harsh touch against his shoulder. They might have taken her where they would, Alma knew nothing of it. Miss Russell looked at her lingeringly a moment; she longed so much to go with her, but she dared not take her pupils to see a girl whom their reverend father "did not know." She retraced her steps rapidly with Arabella and Cecy, and Reuben went onward with his burden.

The governess was as good as her promise. Reuben's

wife, with no over good grace, had but just received her new charge, with much amazement and loud grumbling, till softened, despite herself, by that sad, unconscious face, when Miss Russell came, bringing her own linen for her best-loved pupil's use, and helped her to lay Alma on the couch, which was, if small and hard, scrupulously clean, bathe her burning temples with vinegar, bind up her long, damp hair, and then wait—wait, unable to do more, till medical aid should arrive.

For six weeks Alma lay on that bed, unable to move hand or foot, unconscious to everything surrounding her, life only kept in her by the untiring efforts and master's skill of a brain that put out all its powers to save her, and fought her battle with Death in her defense, unwearied in her cause, though he knew she was young and friendless, and that no payment, save the human life saved, might reward him; while the priest only sighed out his fears that she was not "prepared," and excused himself from all office of his much-boasted Christain charity "on the score of his carrying the infection to his children"—the *infection* of brain fever! If De Vigne had watched over her through those long weeks when her life hung but on a thread, I think it would have driven him mad; it struck to the hearts of all who saw her, to watch her as she lay there, her wide, fair brow knit with pain, her beautiful blue eyes wide open, without sense or thought, only a dull burning glare in her aching eyeballs, her cheeks flushed deeply and dangerously, her long golden hair wet with the ice laid on her temples—her mind gone, not in raving or chattering delirium, but into a strange, dull, voiceless unconsciousness, in which the only tie that linked her to life and reason was that one name which now and then she murmured faint and low, "Sir Folko! Granville!"

The night out in the forest brought on inflammation of

the lungs; the shock, the horror, the agitation of her mind, fever; and against the two only her own young life and the skill that grappled for her with the death that hovered round her couch alone enabled her to battle. At last youth and science conquered; at last the bent brow grew calm, the crimson flush paled upon her face, her long, black lashes drooped wearily upon her cheek, her breathing grew more even, her voice ceased to murmur that piteous wail, "Sir Folko! Granville!" and she slept.

"She will live now," said her doctor, watching that calm and all-healing sleep.

"Thank God!" murmured her old governess, with tears of joy.

"Who is that man whose name she mutters so constantly?" asked Montessor, the medical man, outside her door, while Alma slept on as she had slept for fifteen hours, and did sleep on for another five.

Miss Russell was somewhat embarrassed to reply; her calm and prudent nature had puzzled in vain over Alma's strange, expansive attachment, half childish in its frankness, but so wildly passionate in its strength.

"Really I can hardly tell. I fancy—I believe—she means a gentleman, a friend of Mr. Tressillian's, of whom I know she was very fond."

Montessor smiled.

"Can we find him? He should be within call; for if she has wanted him so much in unconsciousness, she had better not be excited by asking for him in vain when she awakes. What is he?"

"An officer in the army—in the Cavalry, I believe," answered the governess, much more inclined to keep De Vigne away than to bring him there.

"A soldier? Oh, we can soon learn his whereabouts, then. What is his name, do you know?"

"Major De Vigne," said Miss Russell, reluctantly, for if there was anybody that mild and temperate woman disliked on earth, it was the person whom she termed that "fascinating and very dangerous man," at whose feet she had once found Alma sitting so fondly. Montessor put the name in his note-book. Two days after he called on Miss Russell.

"I wrote to the Horse Guards for Major De Vigne's address. They tell me he is gone to the Crimea. Tiresome fellow! he would have been my best tonic."

The doctor might well say so, for when at length she awoke from the lengthened sleep that had given her back to life, enfeebled as she was—so much so that for many days she lay as motionless, though not as unconscious as before—taking passively all the nourishment they brought her, the first words she spoke in her broken voice, which scarcely stirred the air, were:

"Where is he? Can't you bring him here? Pray do; he will come if you tell him I am ill. He will come to his poor little Alma. Go and find him. Pray go!"

And little as Miss Russell could sympathize or comprehend this to her strange and somewhat reprehensible attachment for a man who, as she thought, had never said a word of affection in return; who certainly had never offered to make Alma his wife—the only act on a man's part that could possibly justify a woman in liking him, according to that prudent and tranquil lady's theory—she was too really fond of Alma not to grieve sorely to have no answer with which to relieve that ceaseless and plaintive question, "Why does he not come? Why don't you send for him?" till Miss Russell, far from quick at a subterfuge, and loathing a falsehood, was obliged to have recourse to an evasion, after much difficulty in searching her mind for an *excuse*:

"My dear child, if you excite yourself you will bring on your illness again, and you may never see your friend again. You must not see Major De Vigne yet, for your own sake; besides, remember, your fever is infectious; you would not bring him into danger, surely? When all is safe for you and him we will try how we can bring him here."

Alma gave a deep, heavy sigh; all the returning light died out of her eyes.

"Ah, I shall never get well without him; but I cannot think how I came here, I cannot remember. Let him know how I am; pray do, but tell him I love him better than myself, and I will not see him if there is danger for him; only, only, I wonder he did not come to me,—I would have gone to him!"

And poor little Alma, too weak to rebel, too exhausted still for her memory to recall anything of the past, except what she had remembered even in delirium, De Vigne and her love for him, burst into tears, and lay with her face to the wall, weeping low, heart-broken sobs that went to the heart of those that heard them.

"She will never get well like this," said Montessor, in despair at seeing his victory of science over death being undone again as fast as it could. "Who is this Major De Vigne? Dence take the man, why did he go away just when one wanted him the most? Was Miss Tressillian engaged to him?"

"Not that I ever heard," replied Miss Russell, sorely troubled with the subject. "But, you see, Mr. Montessor, she has very strong affections, and she has led a strange, solitary life, and Major De Vigne was her grandpapa's friend, and has been very kind to her since she came to England; but—you know—it would hardly be correct, if he *were* in England, for him to come here——"



"Correct!" repeated Montessor, with a smile that the man of the world could not for the life of him repress at the good governess's prudery, "we medical men, my dear lady, have no time to stop for conventionalities when life is in the balance; when we have to deal so much with realities, we learn to put that sort of scruple at its right value. If Major De Vigne were anywhere in this country I would make him come and quiet my patient by a sight of him, as none of my opiates will do her without. She will never get well like this; her body is stronger, but she has sunk into a most dangerous lethargy; all she does is to sob quietly, and murmur that man's name to herself, and if we cannot get at the mind we cannot work miracles with the body; that confounded brain and nervous system working together are our worst enemies to deal with, for there are no medicines that will reach them. She will never get well like this; we must rouse her in some way; any shock would be better than this dreamy lethargy; there is no knowing to what mischief it may not lead. I shall tell her he is gone to the Crimea."

"Oh, Mr. Montessor! pray don't!" cried the governess, tender-hearted even to what she considered as so reprehensible an attachment. "Pray don't; I assure you it will kill her!"

"She is much more likely to be killed if left as she is now," answered Montessor. "I shall tell her he is gone to the Crimea, and that she must get well to go after him."

Miss Russell's face of horror at the suggestion made him laugh, in spite of courtesy. "I shall," repeated the doctor; "anything that will rouse her I shall say; if my patients have a fancy to go to the moon I humor them, if humoring the fancy any way tends to their recovery."

"Who do you wish so much to see?" asked Montessor,

gently, when he visited Alma on the morrow and found her lying in the same despondent attitude, no color in her pale cheeks, no light in her sunk eyes.

Alma's mind was not yet wholly awake, but dim memories of what had passed, and what had brought her there, only hovered through her brain, entangled even yet inextricably with the phantasma of delirium. All she was fully awake to, and vividly conscious of, was the longing for De Vigne: so strong was that upon her that she started up in her bed when Montessor asked the question, her eyes getting back some of their old luminous light, and the first faint rose tint of color on her face.

"Sir Folko—Granville—Major De Vigne, my only friend! I am sure they have not told him I am ill, or he would have come. If I could see my old nurse she would tell him—where is she, too? it is so strange—so very strange. Will *you* tell him? do, pray do, I shall never get well till I can see him!" And Alma sank back upon her pillows with a heavy, weary sigh.

Montessor put his hand upon her pulse and kept it there. He saw that her mind was very nearly unhinging again, and since it was out of his power to get De Vigne here, he was obliged to try some other way to rouse her.

"Do you love this friend of yours so much, then?" he asked her, gently still.

Alma looked at him a moment; then her eyes drooped, the faint blush wavered in her cheek, her mind was dawning, and with it dawned the recognition of Montessor as a stranger, and that reluctance to speak of De Vigne to others which was so blended with her demonstrative frankness to him. She answered him more calmly, though with a simplicity and fervor which touched Montessor more than anything else could have done, for the unmasked human nature which his profession had often shown him had made

him naturally and justly skeptical of many of the displays of feelings that he saw.

"Yes," said Alma, lifting her eyes to his face. "Yes, he is all I have on earth! and he will come to me—he will, indeed—if you will only let him know. I cannot think why he is not here. I wish I could remember——"

She pressed her hands to her forehead—the history of the two days began to come to her, but still slowly and confusedly.

"Keep quiet, and you will remember everything in time," said Montessor.

Alma shook her head with a faint sign of dissent. "Not if you keep him away from me—it is a plot, I know it is a plot. Why am I to lie here and never see him? It is cruel. I cannot think why you all try to keep him away——"

She was getting excited again; two feverish spots burned in her cheeks, and her eyes glowed dark and angry.

"No one is trying to keep him away," said Montessor, gravely and slowly. "If it rested with us you should see him this instant—who should plot against you, poor child? But your friend is a soldier, and soldiers cannot always be where they would. There is a war, you know, between England and Russia, and Major de Vigne has been sent off with his troop to the Crimea."

He spoke purposely in few and simple words, not to confuse her with lengthened sentences or verbose preparation. As he thought, it took electrical effect. Alma sprang up in her bed, and seized his wrist in both her hands.

"Gone—gone—away from *me*! Do you mean it? Is it true?"

*Montessor* looked at her kindly and steadily:

"Quite true; it was his duty as a soldier. You must try and get well to welcome him back."

"Gone!—gone! Oh, my God! And to war! Gone! and he never came for one farewell; he never came to see his poor little Alma once again. Gone to the Crimea, and I may never see him, never hear his voice, never look at his face again! He may be ill, and I shall not be there; he may die, and I shall not know it; he may lie in his grave, and I shall not be with him! Gone!—gone! it is *not* true—it cannot be true; he would never go without one word to his little Alma. If it *be* true, let me go to him—I am quite well, quite able; God will give me strength, and I love him too much for death to have any power over me till I have seen him once again."

In her wild, excited agony she would have sprung from her couch, had not Montessor held her down in his firm grasp, and spoken to her in a calm and resolute tone which gave him wonderful sway over his patients.

"Lie still, and listen to me. It is true Major de Vigne is gone to the Crimea; probably he was ordered off, as officers often are, on a moment's notice. He may have sent to you, he may have gone to take leave of you, but that would have been at your home, he could not tell that you were here. If you wish to see him again—if you wish, as you say, to follow him to the Crimea—you must calm yourself, and do your best to recover. This excitement is the worst possible thing for your health, and unless you try to tranquilize your mind you will never be well either to find your friend or to make any inquiries about him. If you do care for him, you must do what I am sure he would wish you—your utmost to be quiet and get well again."

She listened to him with more comprehension in her large, sad eyes than had been in them since Montessor

first saw her. "Thank you, thank you; you are very kind!" But then her head drooped on her hands, a passion of tears convulsed her frame, she sobbed with all the vehemence and abandon of her nature. "Gone!—gone! Oh, life of my life, why did you leave me?"

But Montessor did not mind those tears—there were vitality, passion, reality, and strength in them; they were wholly unlike those pitiful, broken, half-unconscious wailings, and would, he knew, relieve her surcharged brain. He left her to go his rounds, and when she was alone after her first passionate hours of grief, with this shock all the past, link on link, came slowly and bewilderingly to Alma's mind. For the first time since she had been placed, seven weeks before, on that bed in the ranger's cottage, did she remember that horrible race in the midsummer storm, the terrors of that night in Windsor Forest, which had ended in bringing her thither. The Trefusis's visit, Raymond's trap, Castleton's loathed love, the scene in that hateful house, came back upon her memory, and De Vigne had doubtless heard of that flight with Castleton, and, accrediting evil of her, had given her up and gone to the Crimea. She could have shrieked aloud in her agony to have lost him thus—to have him, without whom existence was valueless, gone into danger and death through her; to know that he, from whom her affection had never wandered since the time when, a little child, she had told him "*Alma vi ama*" in the library at old Weive Hurst, and from whom it never would wander, though she were never to see his face again, that he should be left to think she could forsake him, and gone where she could not fly to him to say, "I am yours alone, in life and death!" Surely he must have known that, with such words as they had spoken—with such a parting as theirs had been—she could not have fled with another?—he could not believe that all the love she

had shown him was a lie?—he could not let her go on such cruel evidence? *She* would not have believed against *him*; she had not credited the Trefusis's story; she had felt that it was a link in Castleton's plot—the woman but an emissary of his. De Vigne should have had the same faith in her; Sir Folko should never have left her, his own poor little Alma!

As she thought and thought, Alma grew almost maddened; to lose him just when their hearts were knit in one, just when the heaven of love was dawning before their eyes; to lose him to danger and to death!—she thought her brain would go; with the wild despair, the desperate, fierce longing to see him, be with him, hear his voice in her ear, feel his arms round her, telling her she was his own, and that none could make him doubt her. There was but one thing kept her up, one thought that forced her to calm herself, that one on which Montessor had relied: that to write to him—still more, to go to him, to learn anything of him, to dispel in any way this hideous barrier that had risen up between, as a horrible nightmare fills up the space between the golden evening and the laughing morn—she must get well. In Alma, with all her impetuosity and passion, childlike gayety and reckless impulsiveness, there was much strong volition, much earnest and concentrated fixity of will and purpose; she had not a grain of patience, but she had a great deal of perseverance, insomuch as she grew sick to death of waiting for a thing, but would work on for it with a strength and resolute vehemence that generally brought her her object in the end. If she was wanting to make an out-of-door sketch, and the sky was unpropitious, she was feverish with impatience till it cleared, and would not wait a moment for better weather; but if the sketch depended on her own skill, she was untiring in doing it over and

over again till she had conquered all its difficulties and accomplished her own end. So now, having set heart and mind on getting well, she did her utmost to keep herself from that feverish anguished sorrow, and to still that thirst for his presence, which she knew would only keep her farther from him; and though the bitterness of grief eat into her heart with suffering proportionate to her passionate joy in those brief hours she had known of love in its deep and mutual ecstasy, Alma had hope and resolution to recover, and strength came to her day by day.

Reuben's close cottage was not one to facilitate her restoration: light, air, comforts, atmosphere, all that were most needed for her, were inaccessible there. She had barely strength enough to be lifted from her bed without fainting, and Montessor saw that without the freedom of air, the space, the delicate entourages to which she was accustomed, she would never be better. He was interested in her; her simplicity and fervor in speaking of De Vigne attracted a man who knew life too well not to know the real from the spurious in such things; he had been but a year or so married to a wife whom he loved tenderly, and perhaps her youth made him compassionate on Alma's, and her affection made him believe in the patient's affection for De Vigne, as he might not otherwise have been so ready to do. Miss Russell had faintly hoped that her patrons, considering that they were invariably talking very largely of their charities, might have taken compassion upon her poor little pupil, and since the infectiousness of brain fever was of course but an excuse, might have offered her, when she was able to be moved, one of the many rooms of their large and stately rectory. But the rector—and I must say it is somewhat a peculiarity of the Church—did not much admire being expected to act up to his own sermons, (what man, lay or clerical, by the

way, ever does ?) and if he had been at the Pool of Bethesda would have turned up his aristocratic hooked nose at the dingy beggars, and would never have helped one of them in, unless, indeed, one of them had been a paralytic old Pharisee, whose horn was very high indeed, and who would have proclaimed from the house-top the good deed which our saints, though they profess not to let their left hand know it, are sorely uneasy unless their neighbors throughout Jerusalem are fully aware of and duly accredit.

Miss Russell's rector, like many another rector, since he "knew nothing of the young person," would not have thought of wasting one of his spare beds on a girl "of no connections," and "you know, my dear, for anything we can tell, perhaps of no very purely moral character," as he remarked to his wife, previous to rushing into church in his stiff and majestic surplice, and giving for his text the story of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. Ah me ! we cry out to our neighbors about their purely moral characters till we entirely forget that charity covereth (*i.e.* throweth a veil over, as a man who *does* preach in his pulpit, but does act his own words out I really believe to the best of his sight and his strength, translated it to me once) a multitude of sins. Montessor was not counted a good man by his rector ; indeed, having certain latitudinarian opinions of his own, consequent on his study of man and of nature, and not always keeping them to himself as privately as prudence and his practice might have suggested, was somewhat of a thorn in the rector's side, especially as in argument Montessor inevitably floored him with extreme humiliation, and the rector being once driven to define Grace by him was compelled to the extremely uncomfortable and illogical answer, for which he would have scolded his wife's youngest Sunday scholar, "Well, dear me ;—why, sir, grace is grace !" Montessor,



moreover, did not always go to church, but quite au contraire, and preferred strolling under the solemn aisles of Windsor Forest, and thinking of that great God of Nature whom men lower in their sermons and exclude from their lives. Montessor, as you will perceive, was not a good man—a most dangerous infidel and latitudinarian fellow altogether; and there were two people of whose ultimate damnation the rector was quite comfortably secure; they were Montessor and his wife. Therefore, too, you see it was very natural for poor Miss Russell to look to the rector, and not to Montessor, for charity; but—and I fancy that is as natural too—it was in him and not in the rector that she found it. Montessor knew that a week or two in a house like his might secure Alma's restoration, while she might linger on and on for an indefinite time in the oppressive atmosphere of Reuben's cottage, close and dark as all such tenements are, with an odor in them painful to olfactory nerves unaccustomed to it. As soon as she was able to be moved, Alma, too weak to protest against his will, was carried to his house; and whether it was the light and air of her bed-room there, with the soft September air blowing in, full of the fragrance of the garden flowers, which had imperceptible effect upon her health, or whether because having moved from the cottage where she had suffered so much seemed really a step nearer De Vigne, since it was a step nearer her recovery, Alma—the elasticity and vigor of youth being strong in her—did daily grow stronger and better, and now began to recover as rapidly as she had been slow to do so before. Her gratitude, too, to Montessor spurred her on, for Alma was touched by the slightest kindness, and was of too grateful a nature, however absorbed in her own sorrow, not to rouse herself to appreciate and thank them for the care and the generous kindness both he and his wife lavished upon her.

Mrs. Montessor, with all a girl's love of romance, had taken a deep and wonderful interest in her husband's patient when she heard of her mysterious discovery in the forest, and her attachment for this officer, whose memory was the sole thing that remained on her mind during her unconsciousness, and whose name was first upon her lips on her awakening. She received her in her house with delight, bid her cook make every dish she could imagine to tempt her, indeed would have killed his patient speedily with her delicacies if Montessor had not prevented her, and felt a not unpardonable curiosity to know her story, and how she came there that midsummer night. This Alma, as soon as she was able, told her, having no reason not to do so, and full still of a horrible dread and terror for fear Vane Castleton should ever find her out again. She spoke very little of De Vigne; his name was too dear to her to bring it forward more than she could help, but all the rest she told frankly and fully, as was due, to her new-found friends; and Mrs. Montessor, with much hot vituperation upon Castleton, whom she regarded as a brute and ogre who deserved the fiercest chastisement—a feeling in which I think most of us can sympathize—told the story to her husband over their dinner-table.

As soon as ever she could gather her thoughts, and had strength enough to write, Alma's first effort was to pen to De Vigne the whole detail of Castleton's plot, pouring out to him her grief, her longing to be with him, her prayers to be allowed to hear from him if not to go to him, her anguish at the idea of his danger, all she had suffered, thought, and felt, all the maddening despair with which she had awoke from her illness to find him gone and herself forsaken, upbraiding him for having credited such faithlessness and sin of his own little Alma,—pouring out to him, in a word, all her passionate love and sorrow, as

Alma, to whom feeling usually gave, rather than checked, eloquence, like the improvisatrice of her half-country, had always poured out to him her wildest imaginings, her deepest feelings. When that was done—and, weak as she was, it was some days before she could write to him as she would—Alma sank back on her pillows with a weary sigh, and more bitter tears than even she, checkered as her short life had been, had hitherto ever shed. Many weary weeks must come and pass away, many weary days must dawn, and many nights must fall, before she could have an answer; and even now, before that reached him, what evil might not have befallen him! and from the phantasma of her fears Alma turned, sick and faint, away, yearning—as the bird, whose pinions are tiring in its long flight across the desert, yearns for the sweet ripple of the water-springs, and the perfumes of the citron groves—to be gathered in his arms once more, and hear his love-words whispered in her ear.

The letter was directed to “Major De Vigne, British Army, Crimea,” and Montessor himself posted it. As he told her so, the deep flush upon her cheeks and the fervor of her thanks for so trifling an action showed him how near her heart its speedy voyage lay.

“Would it cost much money to go to the Crimea?” she asked him, as he paid her his visit that evening, fixing her dark-blue eyes on his with that earnest and brilliant regard which, when she had fixed her heart on any request, usually won it for her from all men.

“A great deal, my little lady,” answered Montessor, gently. Though he might be a skeptic, he never sneered at his wife’s or Alma’s wildest thoughts; perhaps because he liked the enthusiastic romance which spoke of youth and unworn hearts; probably because he felt and acknowledged that in both it was *real*, with no taint of exaggeration or affectation.

"How much?" asked Alma, wistfully.

"A hundred or two, at the least."

Her lips quivered, and her head drooped with a heavy sigh.

"Ah! and I have nothing! But, Mr. Montessor, are there not nurses with the army? Have I not heard that ladies sometimes go to be in the hospitals? Could not I go out to him in that way?"

Montessor smiled, amused yet touched.

"Poor child! you are much fit for a nurse! What do you know of wounds, of sickness, of death? What qualification have you to induce them to give you such an office? Do you think they would take such a fair little face as yours among the sick-wards? No, no; that is impracticable. You must *wait*: the lesson hardest of all to learn—one, I dare say, you have never had to learn at all."

It was true she never had, and it was one she never would learn all her life long; she might be chained down, but she would never grow to wait with patience; she would fret her life out like a fettered nightingale, but she would never endure confinement calmly like a cage bird. She had a wild longing to go to the Crimea; not only would she have gone thither had she been rich, but had she but known of any means she would have worked her way there at any cost or any pain, only to be near him in his danger, and to hear him say that for all the witness against her he knew that she was his and his alone. But Alma, poor, unaided, unbacked, utterly ignorant of the forms, the expenses, the necessities of traveling, wholly unfit, with all her spirit and dauntlessness, for the rôle of an "unprotected young lady," Alma had to bow before that curse, under which much that is strongest, noblest, and best in Genius, Talent, and Love, has gone down, never to be able to

shake off the cruel chain upon their wings, the curse of—want of money! She had no money, poor child; barely enough, not nearly enough without Miss Russell's aid, to defray all that she owed to Montessor, to her nurse, to Reuben; how was she, without money, to traverse those weary miles that stretched between her and her lover, across which no cry of hers could reach, no love of hers could shield him? In those days it was only her passionate devotion to De Vigne, and her own determinate will to keep her brain calm and regain health, if she could, to go to him, or find him again by some means, which alone bore her up under the agony she suffered.

Of course she was desirous to leave Montessor's house as soon as she was able, and, warmly as they pressed her to stay, she fixed the earliest day she could bear the drive for her return to St. Crucis. She had not waited till her return to know when and how De Vigne had heard of her flight with Castleton; what he had said when, for the first time in all his visits there, he had found her absent—absent, too, the day after the very night on which she had sworn to him such unswerving love. Old Mrs. Lee wrote her word, as calm lookers-on often do write of the fiercest passions and bitterest sorrows that pass unseen before their very eyes, "The Major called, my darling child, and I told him all as I thought it to be, but as, thank Almighty God, it wasn't. He took it uncommon quiet like, and walked out, and I haven't seen not nothing of him since."

How deep into Alma's heart went those few common words "uncommon quiet like, and then walked out!" What volumes they spoke to her of that mighty anguish of passion, as still and iron-bound as the ice mountains of the Arctic, as certain to burst and break away, bringing death and destruction in its fall! More still for the suffering she had caused him than for that which had fallen

upon herself, did poor little Alma mourn for the impetuous impulse which had flung her so unconscious an assistant into Castleton's plot. "If he die I shall have murdered him! Oh! my God, shield him and bring him back to me, or let me go to him!" that was the one cry, the one prayer that went up from her heart every hour, nay, every moment, for if her lips spoke other words her thoughts never wavered from De Vigne.

The day was fixed for her to leave Windsor for St. Cruis. Montessor and his wife were both unwilling to part with her; for her story, her winning face, her strange, passionate love, of which she so seldom spoke, but which was the very life of her life and soul of her soul, had all won them to her. Alma had a strange fascination for everybody; there was a peculiar, nameless charm in her dark-blue eloquent eyes, her half-foreign impetuosity and fervor, joined to the childlike softness of her voice and manners. She was sure to win friends among the noble-hearted and liberal-minded, as she would, had she mingled in society, have been certain to have gained unnumbered foes among her own sex and lovers among ours, as women worth the most always do.

"The Molyneux are going to Paris, Lena," said Montessor, the morning before Alma left them.

"Indeed! Why and when?"

"Well, in the first place, Miss Molyneux must have change of air somewhere; she will go into consumption, ten to one. I suggested Italy, but she would not hear of it; her mother Paris, to which her ladyship has certain religious, social, and fashionable leanings, all drawing her at once; and to that she assented, poor girl! Pour cause, it is nearer the Crimea!"

"Is that Violet Molyneux?" asked Alma, eagerly. They had fancied her asleep upon the sofa, but she had only

closed her eyes to hide the unshed tears that rose from her heart and gathered under her silky lashes with every thought of De Vigne. "Is she not married to Colonel Sabretasche?"

"No!" answered Lena Montessor, with a sigh of profoundest sympathy and pity. "A fortnight before their wedding-day, his first wife, whom he fully believed to be dead, came forward and asserted her rights. I never heard all the details, but it is easy to fancy what they both suffered. Now he has gone to the Crimea—but do you know her, Alma?"

"Did I know her? Yes! and how bright, how lovely, how radiant she looked! Oh, Heaven! how she must hate that woman!" And Alma shuddered as she thought how *she* would have hated the Trefusis if that lie, that fable, had been true.

"And the wife, eh, what pity for her, Miss Tressillian!" smiled Montessor.

Alma shook her head. "None! If she had left Colonel Sabretasche all those years, long enough to make him think her dead, she could care nothing for him."

"Perhaps *he* left *her*. There are always two sides to a question, mesdemoiselles, and nobody can ever judge between a husband and a wife."

"Now don't talk didactically," cried his own wife. "If *we* ever come before the Divorce Court, I shall have nothing to do but to show in court, and my judges will give me my verdict as they gave Phryne hers, for my perfect loveliness! I won't have you defend that horrid first wife. A man as handsome as I know Colonel Sabretasche is could have no sins, and I should never forgive an angel who had clouded the light in Violet Molyneux's lovely eyes."

Montessor laughed; *he* would not have forgiven an

angel for quenching the light in the eyes that looked at him then so mischievously.

"She is very lovely, I admit, and little deserves the sad fate she has met with now. It is pitiable to see her; perhaps an ordinary observer might not notice her so much, for it is a romantic fallacy that, in youth, sorrow wrinkles the brow and whitens the hair at one coup; if it did, most people would be aged before their twenties! but, to a medical man, the utter despair of the eyes, and that dangerous hectic flushing up so strongly one minute, and fading so suddenly till she is as white as the dead, tell him more than enough. She holds herself as fully bound to Colonel Sabretasche, I believe, as though their engagement had never been broken; Lord Molyneux sanctions the idea, but you may be sure my lady will do her best to overcome it."

"Is Colonel Sabretasche gone to the Crimea?" asked Alma. It touched her strangely, this story of Violet Molyneux, that radiant belle whom she had once so much envied. How utterly had all their fates changed since that brilliant ball in Lowndes Square but three months before, when such perfect and cloudless happiness had seemed so secure to Violet; when on Alma had only dawned the first roseate hue of unconscious love, and all the bitterness of passion was as yet far away from her!

"Yes, he was ordered off with his Lancers; and so thorough a soldier as I have heard he was, with all his dolce and love of ease, would hardly have refused the campaign, even had it taken him from his first bridal days."

"No; but she would have gone with him!—and they are going to Paris, you say?"

"Yes, I recommended it; so did Dr. Watson, when he sounded Violet's lungs, and agreed with me that there was no mischief yet, though there may be before long; if



change of air does not send her cough away, they must take her to Florence or Biarritz. After her parting with Colonel Sabretasche, she lay where he had left her, in a dead swoon, from which they could not wake her. They sent for the physicians and for myself, and all the night through she had a succession of fainting fits; since then she has never recovered; she will smile, she will talk to her mother, to her friends; but her health suffers for all that. A casual observer, as I say, would not notice it; but I can see that it is an even chance if she ever recover the shock given her in the very time of her fullest joy, her utmost security. Lady Molyneux would like to have a companion for her in Paris; the Viscountess will have a thousand religious excitements and social amusements, in which her daughter will not participate, and she would like to find somebody to keep Violet company and rouse her, as Lady Molyneux will have neither time nor inclination to do. I did not know—I thought would you——” And Montressor hesitated; for though he knew how unprovided for and unprotected Alma was, he had too much intuitive delicacy and generosity to like to touch upon it.

“Would they take me?” said Alma, lifting her head. The sentence “Paris is nearer the Crimea” rang in her ear: who could tell but what, once there, she might get still nearer to him; besides, Violet would correspond with Colonel Sabretasche; Sabretasche and De Vigne were most intimate friends; they were in the same arm of the service, they would be together; she would be far nearer De Vigne with the Molyneux than in the dreary solitude of St. Crucis, where, forsaken by him whose presence had once illumined it, she felt that she could never endure to be left alone to watch, to wait, to think; dreading every hour, and ignorant whether each of them might not bring the tidings of his death, every sun that set and dawned might

not shine upon the battle-field, where he lay, his life quenched and gone forever.

"Would you go?"

"Yes," said Alma, pressing her little hands convulsively.

"Yes—if I am free to leave them when I will. Miss Molyneux was very kind to me; I think she would take me if she knew."

"Miss Molyneux has not heard anything of it; it is her mother's idea; but I will mention it to the Viscountess when I go to town to-morrow," said Montessor. "Since you know them, I have no doubt she will be very happy to give you the preference, and change of air will do you good as well as her daughter."

Alma did not answer him; she thought that both to Violet and her air and scene mattered little, while to all climes they took with them the curse of absence from those that both held dearer than life itself.

Montessor was as good as his word. Some years before, Violet's brother, then a graceless Etonian, now a young attaché to the British Legation at Paris, had been nearly drowned in the Thames, and had been pulled out at last to go through a severe attack of bronchitis, which all but cost him his life, would probably have done so quite but for Montessor, to whom Jockey Jack was so grateful for saving his only heir's life—a life so valueless in itself, but so all-important, since the continuation of the Molyneux line depended on that empty-headed and bad-hearted Oppidan—that he gave the doctor the most beautiful mare in his stables, and had him called in whenever there was any illness in the family, though Montessor, at the onset, had mortally offended Madame by assuring her she would have very good health if she would only leave off sal-volatile, and get up before one o'clock in the day. On that Lady Molyneux had nothing more to

say to him till her pet physician, who had kept her good graces by magnifying her migraines and flattering her nerves, once very nearly killed her by doctoring her for phthisis when her disease was but the more unpoetic ailment of liver, and she was glad to have Montessor back again. Since that time he had always had a certain influence over the Viscountess, possibly because he was the only man who had seen her without her rouge, and told her the truth courteously but uncompromisingly, and when he mentioned Alma as a companion for Violet, her ladyship graciously acquiesced. "Miss Tressillian? She did not recollect the name. Very likely she had seen her, but she really could not remember. A little artist, was she? Oh, she thought she *had* some recollection of a little girl Violet patronized, but she couldn't remember. If Mr. Montessor recommended her, that was everything; as long as she was ladylike and of unimpeachable moral character, that was all she required. She only wanted her to be with them in case Violet were unwell or declined society. She must be free to leave them any day she chose? What a very singular stipulation! However, rather than have any more trouble about it, would he have the goodness to tell her she would give her fifty guineas and her traveling expenses; and they should leave London that day week."

"Fifty guineas! Less than her maid makes by her place!" thought Montessor, as he threw himself into a Hansom to drive back to the Waterloo station. He was essentially a generous man himself; he had no scant of benevolence about him; he considered that to people delicately nurtured, with refined tastes and quick sensibilities, the struggles, the mortification, the narrowed and cruel lines of poverty are far harder than to the poor, born amid squalor, nurtured in deprivation, whose most resplendent memories and dreams are of fat bacon and fried

potatoes. He was generous, but discriminatingly so; and though he compelled his just dues from the man who had lamb and peas at their earliest, while by a woe-begone face and dextrous text he was making the rector believe him an object of profoundest pity, Montessor would not take a farthing from the young girl, on whose delicate organization and quick susceptibilities he knew the poverty, from which her own talents had alone protected her, and from which in illness they could not guard her, must prey most heavily. I need not say how Alma felt and took his kindness; felt it with the warmth of a heart touched by the slightest thought of her into gratitude deep and lasting; took it with the frankness of a nature too generous itself to harbor false pride, thinking, indeed, of a time when she should be able to repay it—not to rid herself of the obligation, but to show him her own undying gratitude.

Alma was grateful; her nature more quick at appreciating, more tenacious in remembering kindness done her than any one's I ever knew; all the charity and tenderness shown her in her suffering in Windsor sank deep into her heart, never to be effaced or forgotten in happier hours, should such ever come to her. Still when, the day before her departure from England, she gazed round the room at St. Crucis, where the pictures he had praised, the flowers he had given, the brilliant bird that syllabled his name, the very sunshine that had never seemed bright save in his presence; the room where his burning love-vows had been spoken, where his passionate caresses had spoken eloquence stronger than words, where everything breathed of him whose presence was life to her, and absence death, Alma threw herself upon the ground with more bitter tears than De Vigne—many women as had loved him—had ever had shed for him. "Granville, Granville, my *only* friend, why have you forsaken me?"

## PART THE TWENTY-SECOND.

## I.

## ONE OF THOSE WHOM ENGLAND HAS FORGOTTEN.

THE chill Crimean winds blew from the north of Sebastopol, and the dust whirled and skerried before our eyes, as we kept the line in front of Cathcart's Hill on the morning of the 8th September, while the Guards stood ready in Woronzoff-road, and the Second and Light Divisions moved down to the trenches, and the Staff stationed themselves in the second parallel of the Green Hill Battery, and the amateurs, who had come out to see what was doing in the Crimea, as they went other years to Norwegian fishing or Baden roulette, were scattered about in yachting costume, and stirred to deep excitement as the Russian shells began to burst among us and the bombs to fall with thuds loud enough to startle the strongest nerves.

What would young ladies at home, full of visions of conquering heroes and myrtle and bay leaves, and all the pomp and circumstance of war, have said if, in that cold, dusty, raw Crimean morning, they had seen General Simpson, with only nose and eyes exposed, coddled up in a great-coat, and General Jones, a *vrai héros* in spite of all costume, in his red bonnet de nuit—a more natural accompaniment to a Candle lecture than to a siege—and Sir Richard, with his pocket-handkerchief tied over his ears after the manner of old ladies afflicted with catarrh? Ah me! it was not much like Davy Baird leading the forlorn hope under the hot sun of Seringapatam, or Wellington, "pale but ever collected," giving his prompt orders from

the high ground behind San Christoval! Yet, God knows, there was daring and gallantry enough that day to have made of the Redan a second Ciudad Rodrigo; that it was not so, was no fault of the troops; the men whom Unett and Windham tossed up to lead would, had they been allowed, have given England as complete a success as they gave her invincible pluck, and the dead bodies piled high on the slopes of the Great Redan were offered up as cheerfully and as nobly as though the fancied paradise of the Mahometan soldier awaited them, instead of the ordinary rewards of the British one—abuse and oblivion.

Heaven forefend that I should attempt to give you a description of the morning of the 8th. William Russell has told all our stories for us better than we could any of us tell them for ourselves; a man engaged in a battle or an attack can only see things as they go on around him, specially when stationed, as we were, at some little distance from the actual encounter; while smoke and dust and a leaden-colored atmosphere all interfered with a view of those "dun-colored, rugged parapets," where young boys fresh from their native villages were sent to fight some of the best-drilled regiments of Europe.

The tricolor waved from the parapet of the Malakoff, and Chapman's Battery sent up the sparks of four rockets against the raw gray clouds. Our men at the signal left the fifth parallel, and the Russian muskets swept along their ranks to such deadly result that in the few minutes' passage upward to the salient, Shirley, Van Straubenzee, Handcock, Hammond, Welsford, most of their leaders and many of their officers, were hors de combat, if not dead. Then, as all the world knows, there were but half a dozen ladders, and those few were too short! But the officers led on and the troops followed them, jumping down into the ditch fifteen feet deep, and scaled the parapet, and

once in, the carnage began, where, "fed by feeble driblets," and unable to form into line, not all the heroism of their leaders or the courage of their officers could prevent their being shot down péle-mêle. We could see little beyond the great dull parapets of the Redan, and the troops that were pouring into and over it, and, though they were forced back again under the dense smoke of the Russian musketry, twice capturing the position, and twice pushed back down the slopes, slippery with human blood and piled with human bodies. It was afterward, from the wounded that were brought down the Woronzoff-road, and from the remnant that came back unscathed from the reeking salient, that we heard the detail of the struggle in which we could take no part; heard how Windham held the triangle with the storm of shot seething round him, and crossed alone, amid the death-rattle of grape and rifle bullets, with his gallant, "Now mind, let it be known, in case I am killed, why I went away"—to demand too late the support which should have been there unasked; heard how Pat Mahoney fell dead in the embrasure, shouting beside his colonel, "Come on, boys, come on!" how Lysons, of the 23d, shot through the thigh, still kept his ground, cheering on his men to the very last; how Handcock was shot through the brain, and his body carried past the picket-house, where his wife was watching for him, back out of that fatal salient; how Molesworth sprang upon the parapet and lighted his cigar, smoking and cheering on his fellows to follow him. And we heard, too, what all the individual daring could not retrieve to any of us, least of all to those who did all that men could do to fight against the disadvantages with which the attack on the Redan was encircled at every side,—we heard how the fire from the traverses killed off the storming party so rapidly that there was no force left large enough to sweep across; how the gabions gave way

and broke down with the men gathered upon them; and Rowland, trying to charge across the open space with his handful of men, had almost all of them shot down one after the other; how the officers, picked out by the Russian fusillade, fell on every side, marked out by their own daring, and their men, bewildered for want of leaders, got mixed together, and, rushing in inextricable confusion to the front, were swept down by the Russians, who, covered by their breastworks, could be but little injured by our fire.

We heard how three times Windham sent for the support, without which nothing decisive could be done in that fatal scene of carnage, where the British, unbacked, had nothing but broken ranks to oppose to the steady fire of the enemy and to the fresh troops who were swarming from the town and the evacuated Malakoff. We heard how, when at last he had leave "to take the Royals," the permission came too late; how the Russians, collecting some thousands of their troops behind the breastworks, charged our troops with the bayonet, while their rear ranks poured over their heads a volley upon our men, who averaged one against three Muscovites, and were unable to form from the narrow neck of the salient. We heard how hand-to-hand our plucky fellows stood their ground against the granite mass, that, swelling every moment from the rear, pressed down upon them, till those who had held the salient, unsupported for an hour and three-quarters, under a fire that thinned their ranks as a scythe mows down meadow grass, grappling to the last with the Russians in the embrace of death, were forced from the loose earth and breaking gabions that made their ground, and, pelted with great stones, were driven down by the iron tramp that crushed recklessly alike friend and foe, till slipping, panting, bleeding, exhausted, *pêle-mêle*, they fell on to the mass of bayonets, muskets, and quivering human life that lay mingled



together in the ditch below, the men rolling over each other like loose stones down a crevasse; the living crushed by the dead, the dying struggling under the weight of the wounded; the scarps giving way and burying not a few alive, while those who could struggle from the horrible heap of human life, where the men lay four deep, ran for life and death to reach the English trench. We heard that, and more too—longer details than can find space here—and, if we were not “Christian” to swear as fiercely as we did to avenge the Redan; if we had not done so, we should scarcely have been human—we should assuredly have not been English. Sad stories passed from one another. We were all down in the mouth that night; for though the officers had been as game and as gallant as men could be, flinging down their lives as of no account, their men had not imitated them; and it was hardly the tale that we, after the long winter of '54-'55, and the weary, dreary, hopeless months of inaction, had hoped to be rewarded with, by sending home to England. Wellington was wont to say that the saddest thing, after a defeat, was a victory. I think his iron heart would have broken over the loss of human life, the waste of heroic self-devotion that was seen on the parapets of the Redan.

We knew that Curly was to lead the —th with the Light Division that day, and we thought of him anxiously enough when we saw from Cathcart's Hill the smoke pouring out from the rugged parapets, and the troops fighting their way over, only to be sent forth again decimated and exhausted.

I saw him early on the morning of the 8th, when we were all looking forward to the attack, and hoping, though but faintly, for success that should make the long-watched city ours. I saw him about half-past six, before we were posted, as he was chatting with some other fellows of the

Light Division about the coming assault, which they were longing for as ardently as in days passed away they had longed for the dawn of the 1st or the 12th. Curly was in better spirits than he had been since he landed in the Crimea: he put me strangely in mind of the little fellow I had first known at Frestonhills, as he stood in that careless nondescript costume which we dandies of the Queen's had adopted, his old gay *débonnaire* smile on his lips, a cap much the worse for wind and weather on those silky yellow locks that we had teased his life out about in the old school-days; a pipe of good Turkish tobacco peering out from beneath his long blonde moustaches à la Hongrois. I had not seen him look so much like his old gay light-hearted self since the campaign began; and as we paced past him in the raw gray morning, I laughingly wished him good luck; he laughed, too, as he told us he was going in for all the honors now, and should have a clasp the more to his medals than we. De Vigne, as we passed, pulled up his horse for a second, bent from his saddle, and gave him his hand, with a sudden impulse. Bitter words had been between them—words such as he had found it hard to pardon; but now his old warm love for Curly rose up in him, and, forgetting or forgiving all, he looked on him kindly, almost wistfully, and offered his Frestonhills pet as warm a grasp as before Alma Tressillian and their mutual love for her had come between them. For the first moment Curly's eyes flashed with angry fire; then the better spirit in him conquered, his hand closed firm and warm on De Vigne's, and they looked at one another as they had used to do in days gone by, before the love of woman had parted them.

There was no time for speech; that cordial shake of their hands was their silent greeting and farewell, and we left Curly laughing and chatting with his pipe in his lips,

and his lithe, youthful figure standing out against the gray cold sky, while we rode onward to form the line on Cathcart's Hill. I think De Vigne thought more than once of his old school pet when from our post we saw the ramparts of the Redan belching forth fire and smoke, and the ambulances coming down the Woronzoff Road with their heavy and pitiful burdens. Both he and I, I fancy, thought a good deal about Curly that day leading his Light Bobs on to the Russian fusillade. We saw them through the clouds of dust and smoke scale the parapet, with Curly at their head, some of the foremost to enter the Redan; we lost them amid the obscurity which the fire of the musketry and the flames of the burning embrasure raised around the scene of carnage and confusion, and whether he was there among the remnant who were forced over the parapet and fell, or jumped, pêle-mêle, into that mass of human misery below, where English pluck was still so strong among them that some laughs they say were heard at their own misery, we could not tell. If I were a believer in presentiments, which I am not, having seen too much real life to have time to accredit the mystic, I could fancy our thoughts of Curly were a foreboding of his fate. But a very few out of the gallant —th lived through the struggle in the salient, and the perilous passage back to our own advanced parallel; there were but a very few left of the old veterans, and the young recruits, who had gone up that morning to the assault of the Redan, with devotion enough in their commanders to have made of it a second Badajoz, and poor Curly, their Colonel, was not among them—not even among the wounded in the temporary hospitals; but late that night, Kennedy, one of his sergeants, told to De Vigne and me and a few other men another of those stories of individual heroism so great in their example, so unfortunate in their

reward ; telling it in rough, brief words, not picturesquely or poetically, yet with an earnestness that gave it eloquence to us, with those frowning ramparts in front and those crowded hospitals behind :

"We was a'most the first into the Redan, Major. When I see the ladders, so few, and what there was on 'em so short, I began to think as how we should never get in at all ; but Colonel Brandling, he leaped into the ditch and scrambled up the other side as quick as a cat, with a cheer to do your heart good, and we went a'course after him and scaled the parapet, while the Russians ran back and got behind the traverses to fire upon us as soon as we got atop. What possessed 'em I don't know, Major, but you've heard that some of our men began loading and file-firing instead of follering their officers to the front ; so many trench-bred infantry men *will* keep popping away forever if you let 'em ; but the Colonel led on to the breastwork with his cigar in his mouth, just where he'd put it for a lark when he jumped on the parapet. There was nobody to support us, and our force weren't strong enough to carry it, and we had to go back and get behind the traverses, where our men were firing on the Russians, and there we stayed, sir, packed together as close as sheep in a fold, firing into the Redan as long as our powder lasted. I can't tell you, Major, very well how it all went on ; it wasn't a right assault like, it was all hurry-scurry and confusion, and though the officers died game, they couldn't form the troops 'cause they were so few, sir, and the salient so narrow. But it was the Colonel I was to tell you about, Major. I was beside him a'most all the time. At first he seemed as if nothing *would* hit him ; one ball knocked his cap off, and another grazed his hair. He had as near shaves as Colonel Windham, but he took it all as careless as if he was at a ball, and he just

turned to me, sir, with his merry smile: 'Good fun, eh, Kennedy?' Them was the last words he spoke, sir. Just at that minute the enemy charged us with the bayonet, and the devils behind 'em began to pour volleys on us from the breastwork. Four of them Russians closed round the Colonel, and he'd nothing but his sword against their cursed bayonets. I closed with one on 'em; he was as hard as death to grip with. The Colonel killed two of 'em offhand, though they was twice as big as he, but the third, just as his arm was lifted, ran him right through the left lung, and a ball from them devils on the breastwork cut off one of his feet, just as the shot cut off Major Trowbridge's last year. Then he fell straight down, Major, of course, and I was a going to fight my way to him and carry him off in my arms, and I *would* ha' done it, sir, too, but the Russians pressed so hard on the front ranks that they pushed us straight off the parapet, and I only caught a sight of the Colonel lifting himself up on his elbow, and waving us on with a smile—God bless him!—and then I fell over into the ditch, with Pat O'Leary atop of me, and I see him no more, Major, and he must be dead, sir, or else a prisoner in that confounded city."

And honest Kennedy, whose feeling had carried him beyond recollection of delicate language or other presence than his own, stopped abruptly. In his own words, he "felt like a fool," for Curly, like Eman of the 41st, was loved by all the men who served under him.

De Vigne set his teeth hard as he listened; he turned away, sick at heart. Memories of his Frestonhills pet thronged upon him: the little fellow who had been so eager for his notice, so proud of his patronage; the merry, light-hearted child, with his golden locks and his fearless spirits; the wild young Cantab, with his larks and his deviltry; the dandy Guardsman about town, so game

in the hunting-field, so bored in the ball-room; the warm, true, honest heart, unstained by the world he lived in; the friend, the rival, who had loved *his* love more unselfishly than he. Poor little Curly!—and he was lying yonder, behind those smoking ramparts, wounded and a prisoner—perhaps dead!

For an instant De Vigne's eyes flashed with eagle glance over the stormed city, lying there grim and gaunt, in the shadow of the gray-hued day, and but that his duty as a soldier held him back, I believe he would not have hesitated to cross those death-strewn lines alone, and rescue Curly or fall with him.

The Crimea is not so far distant but that the world knows how we were awakened the morning after by the Russian general's masterly retreat, by thunder louder than that which had stunned our ears for twelve months long, by the explosion of the Flagstaff and Garden batteries, by the tramp of those dense columns of Russian infantry passing to the opposite side, by the glare of the flames from Fort Nicholas, by the huge columns of black smoke rising from Fort Paul, by the sight of that fair and stately Empress of the Euxine abandoned and in flames! Little did the people at home—hearing Litanies read and hymns sung in the village churches nestling among the fresh English woodlands—dream what a grand funeral mass for our dead was shaking the earth with its echoes that Sabbath morning in the Crimea.

It was as late as Wednesday before De Vigne and I got passes from the adjutant-general's office, and went into the town before whose granite ramparts we had lain watching and waiting for twelve weary months. What a road it was through the French works! a very Fair Rosamond's maze of trenches, zigzags, and parallels, across the French sap, where every square inch might be marked "Sta

viator, heroem calcas;" treading our way through the heaps of dead, where the men lay so thickly one on the other, just as they had fallen, shoulder to shoulder, till we were inside the Malakoff. It was horrible there, even to us, used as we were to bloodshed, and to mangling, and to human suffering in every form of torture. I wonder how it would have suited the nerves of those gentlemen who sit at home at ease, and dictate from their arm chairs how this should have been done, and that should have been avoided? I fancy Messieurs the Volunteer Rifles, who think themselves just now "so much better than a standing army," taken in to such a scene after one of their days of ball-practice or Hyde Park turn out, would very likely turn sick and faint, and not find "soldiering" quite so pleasant as firing at a butt and toasting the ladies. Four piles of dead were heaped together like broken meat on a butcher's stall—not a whit more tenderly—and cleared out of the way like carrion; the ground was broken up into great pools of blood, black and noisome; troops of flies were swarming like mimic vultures on bodies still warm, on men still conscious, crowding over the festering wounds, (for these men had lain there since Saturday at noon!) buzzing their death-rattle in ears already maddened with torture; *that* was what we saw in the Malakoff, what we saw a little later in the Great Redan, where, among cook-houses brimful of human blood, English and Russian lay clasped together in a fell embrace, petrified by death; where the British lay in heaps, mangled beyond recognition by their dearest friends, or scorched and blackened by the recent explosions, and where—how strange they looked there!—there stood outside the entrance of one of the houses a vase of flowers and a little canary, rebuking, as it were, with their soft and gentle beauty, the outrage of Nature that stretched around them. But we did not stay to notice the once

white and stately city, now ruined and defaced, with its snow-like walls, now black and broken with our shot; we went straight on toward Fort Paul, as yet untouched, where stood the hospital, that chamber of horrors, that worse than charnel-house, from which strong men retreated, unable to bear up against the loathsome terrors it inclosed. That long, low room, with its arched roof, its square pillars, its dim, cavernous light coming in through the shattered windows, was a sight worse than all the fabled horrors of painter, or poet, or author; full of torment—torment to which the cruelest torture of Domitian and Nero were mercy—a hell where human frames were racked with every possible agony, not as a chastisement for sin, but as a reward for heroism! De Vigne, iron as his nerves were counted, used as he had been to death and pain, strong soldier as he was, capable of Spartan endurance and braced to English impassibility, closed his eyes involuntarily as he entered, and a shudder run through his frame as he thought of *who* might be lying there among those dead and dying men that the Russian general had abandoned to their fate. There they lay, packed as closely together as dead animals in a slaughter-house—the many Russians, the few English soldiers, who had been dragged there after the assault, to die as they might; they would but have cumbered the retreat, and their lives were valueless now! There they lay: some on the floor that was slippery with blood like a shamble; some on pallets, saturated with the stream that carried away their life in its deadly flow; some on straw, crimson and noisome, the home of the most horrible vermin; some dead hastily flung down to be out of the way, black and swollen, a mass of putrefaction, the eyes forced from the sockets, the tongue protruding, the features distended in hideous grotesqueness; others dead, burnt and charred in the explo-



sion, a heap of blanched bones and gory clothes and blackened flesh, the men who but a few hours before had been instinct with health and hope and gallant fearless life ! Living men in horrible companionship with these corpses, writhing in torture which there was no hand to relieve, no help from heaven or earth to aid, with their jagged and broken limbs twisted and powerless, were calling for water, for help, for pity ; shrieking out in wild delirium or disconnected prayer the name of the woman they had loved or the God that had forsaken them, or rolling beneath their wretched beds in the agony of pain and thirst which had driven them to madness, glaring out upon us with the piteous helplessness of a hunted animal, or the ferocious unconsciousness of insanity.

We passed through one of these chambers of terrors, our hearts sickened and our senses reeling at the hideous sight, the intolerable stench that met us at every step. Great Heaven ! what must those have endured who lay there days and nights with not a drop of water to soften their baked throats, not a kind touch to bind up their gaping wounds, not a human voice to whisper pity for their anguish ; before their dying eyes scenes to make a strong man reel and stagger, and in their dying ears the shrieks of suffering equal to their own, the thunder of exploding magazines, the shock of falling fortresses, the burst of shells falling through the roof, the hiss and crash and roar of the flaming city round them !

We passed through one chamber in which we saw no one who could be Carly, or at least who we could believe was he, for few of the faces there could have been recognized by their nearest and their dearest—for not Edith's quest of Harold wanted so keen an eye of love as was needed to seek for friend or brother in the hospital of Sebastopol.

We entered a second room, where the sights and the odors were yet more appalling than in the first. Beside one pallet De Vigne paused and bent down; then his pale bronze cheek grew white, and he dropped on his knee beside the wretched bed—at last he had found Curly. Poor dear Curly! still alive, in that scene of misery, lying on the mattress that was soaked through with his life-blood, his broken ankle twisted under him, the wound in his shoulder open and festering, his eyes closed, his bright hair dull and damp with the dew of suffering that stood upon his brow, his face of a livid blue-white hue; the gay, gallant, chivalrous English gentleman, thrown down to die as he would not have had a dog left in its suffering. On one side of him was a black charred corpse, swollen in one place, burnt to the bone in another; could that ever have been a living, breathing human soul, with thought and hope and life, loving, acting, aspiring?—the woman that loved him best could not have known him now! On the other side of him, close by, was a young Russian officer but just dead, with an angry frown upon his handsome features, and his hands, small and fair as a girl's, filled with the straw that he had clutched at in his death agony; and between these two dead men lay Curly!

De Vigne knelt down beside him, lifting his head upon his arm. "My God, Arthur, is he dead?"

At the familiar voice his eyes unclosed, first with a dreamy vacant stare in them—his mother's heart would have broken at the wreck of beauty in that face, so fair, so delicate, so handsome but a few days before.

"Curly, Curly, dear old fellow!—don't you know me?"

How soft and gentle was De Vigne's voice as he spoke, with that latent tenderness which, though all had chilled, nothing could wholly banish from his heart!

Curly looked at him dreamily, unconsciously. "What! is that the prayer bell? Is the Doctor waiting?"

His thoughts were back among the old school-days at Frestonhills, when we first met at the old Chancery—when we little thought how we were doomed to part under the murderous shadow of Fort Paul.

De Vigne bent nearer to him. "Look at me, dear old boy. You must know *me*, Curly."

But he did not; his head tossed wearily from side to side, the fever of his wounds had mounted to his brain, and he moaned out delirious disconnected words.

"Why don't they form into line, Kennedy—why don't they form into line? If there were more of us, we could take that breastwork. Water!—water! Is there not a drop of water *anywhere*? We shall die of thirst. I should like to die in harness, but it is hard to die of thirst like a mad dog—like a mad dog—ha! ha!" (Both of us shuddered, as the mocking, hideous laughter rang through the chamber of death.) "Alma!—Alma! Who talked of Alma? Can't you bring her here once, just once, before I die? I think she would be kinder to me now, perhaps; I loved her very much; she did not care for me—she would not care now—she loves De Vigne. You know how I have hated him—my God! how I have hated him—and yet—I loved him once better than any man till *she* came between us. Oh, for God's sake, give me water—water, for the love of Heaven!"

At the muttered raving words De Vigne's face grew as livid for the moment as that of the dead Russian beside him, and his hand trembled as he took a flask from his belt that he had filled with sherry before starting, and held it to Curly's lips. How eagerly he drank and drank, as if life and reason would flow back to him with the draught! For a time it gave him strength to fling off the faintness

and delirium fastening upon him; his eyes grew clearer and softer, and as De Vigne raised him into a sitting posture, and supported him on his arm with all the gentle care of a woman, he revived a little, and looked at him with a conscious and grateful regard.

"De Vigne! How do you come here? Where am I? Oh! I know; is the city taken, then?"

Dying as he was, the old spirit in him rallied and flashed up for a brief moment, while De Vigne told him how the Russians had retreated, leaving Sebastopol in flames. But he was too far gone to revive long; he lay with his head resting on De Vigne's arm, his eyelids closed again, his breathing faint and quick, all his beauty and his manhood and his strength stricken down into the saddest wreck that human eyes can see and human passions cause. Few could have recognized the once gay, brilliant Guardsman, whom women had loved for his beauty and his grace, in the wounded man who was stretched on that wretched and gore-stained pallet, with his life ebbing away simply for want of that common care that a friendless beggar would have been given at home.

"Is the city won?" he asked again; his low and feeble words scarcely heard in the shrieks, the moans, the muttered prayers, the groans, the oaths around him.

"Yes, dear Curly," answered De Vigne, not heeding the pestilence of which the air was reeking, and from which many a man as strong as he had turned heart-sick away, while he bent over the death-bed of the friend who so many years ago had been his pet and favorite at Frestonhills.

"I am glad of that," said Curly, dreamily. "England is sure to win; she is never beaten, is she? I should like to fight once more for her, but I never shall, old fellow; the days here—how many are they?—have done for me.

It is hard to die like this, De Vigne!" And a shudder ran through his frame, that was quivering with every torture. "God knows, I longed to fall in the field, but not a bullet would hit me *there*; however, it does not matter much; it comes to the same thing; and if we won, that is all I care. Tell my mother I die quite content, quite happy. Tell her not to regret me, and that I have thought of her often, very often—she was good and gentle to me always—and bid my father, if he loves me, to be kinder to Gus—Gus was a good old fellow, though we made game of him."

Curly paused; slowly and painfully as he had spoken, the exertion was greater than his fading strength could bear; he, three days before the ideal of manly vigor, grace, and beauty, was powerless as a new-born child, helpless as a paralyzed old man, stricken down like a gracious and beautiful cedar-tree by the hacking strokes of the woodman's axe, its life crushed, its glory withered; only to be piled amid a heap of others to make the bonfires for a conqueror's ovation.

De Vigne bent over him, his cheek growing whiter and whiter as he thought of the boy's early promise and sunny boyhood, and of the man's death amid such horror, filth, and desolation as England would have shuddered to compel her paupers, her convicts, nay, the very unowned dogs about her streets, to suffer in; yet made small count of having forced it on her heroes to die in it like murrained cattle.

"Curly, dear Curly," he whispered, pushing off the clammy hair from Brandling's forehead as gently as any woman, "why talk of death? Once out of this d——d hole," (ah, reverend Christians in England, you would have found it hard to keep to holy language amid such horrors as De Vigne saw then!) "you will get well, old

fellow; you SHALL get well; men have got over wounds ten times more dangerous than yours. We shall have many a day together still at home among the bracken and the stubble."

Curly smiled faintly :

"No, never again. I do not die from the wounds; what has killed me, De Vigne"—and at the memory the old delirious vagueness grew over his eyes, which wandered away into the depths of his dire prison-house—"has been the sights, the accents, the sounds. Oh, my God, the horrors I have seen! In sermons we used to hear them try sometimes to describe a hell; if those preachers had been here as I have been, they would have seen we don't want devils to help us make one—men are quite enough! The stench, the ravings, the roar of the flames around us, the vile creeping things, the blasphemy, the prayers, the horrible thirst—oh, God! I *prayed* for madness, De Vigne; prayed for it as I never prayed for anything in all my life before, and yet I am no coward either!"

He stopped again, a deathly gray spread over his face, and a cold shiver ran through him; the brain, last of all to die, the part immortal and vital amid so much death, triumphed yet awhile over the dissolution of the body. Curly knew that he was dying fast, and signed De Vigne down nearer still to him.

"De Vigne, when the war is over, and you go back to England, first of all try and seek out Alma Tressillian."

The fierce red blood crimsoned De Vigne's very brow; had it been a living and not a dying man who had dared to breathe that name to him, I think he would have provoked a reply he would have little cared to hear. All the mad passion, all the infinite tenderness there were in his heart, stronger still than ever, for his lost love, rose up at the abrupt mention of her.

"Will you promise me?" asked Curly; "to give me peace in my death-hour, promise me."

"No," said De Vigne, between his teeth, clinched like an iron vice. "I cannot promise you. Why should you wish me? You loved her yourself——"

"*Because I loved her myself, because I love her still; love her so well that it is the thought that in my grave I shall never hear her little soft voice, never see her bright-blue eyes, never meet her once again, that makes me shrink from death,*" said Curly; an unutterable tenderness and despair in those faint broken tones whose last utterance was Alma's name. "I do love her, too well to believe what you believe, that she is Vane Castleton's mistress."

De Vigne's hands clinched the straw of the pallet like a man in bodily agony.

"For God's sake be silent! Do not drive me to madness. Do you think I should believe it without proof?——"

"On the spur of anger and jealousy you *might*. I do not know, I cannot tell, but I could never think her capable of falsehood, of dishonor," whispered Curly, his breath growing shorter, his eyes more dim, though even on his haggard cheek a flush just rose, wavered, and died out, as he went on: "The day she—she—rejected me I accused her of her love for you, and then she answered me as a woman would hardly have done if she had not cared for you very dearly. Before I left England I left all I had to her; it is little enough, but it will keep her from want. Let some one seek her out, even though she were sunk in the lowest shame, and see that they give her my money. It will save her from the vile abyss to which Castleton would leave her to sink down as she might;—as she must. Promise me, De Vigne—or you, Chevasney—promise me, or I cannot *die in peace*."

"No, no, *I* promise you."

Hoarse and low as De Vigne's voice was, Curly heard it, a look of gratitude came into the eyes once so bright and fearless, now so dim and dull.

"And if you find that she does love you, you will not reward her for her love as we have done too many?"

Whiter and whiter yet grew De Vigne's face, as his hands clinched harder on the straw of Curly's bed; it was some moments before he spoke:

"*I dare* not promise that. God help me!"

But his words fell on ears deaf at last to the harsh fret and bustle of the world; the faintness of that terrible last struggle of brain and body with the coming chill of death had crept over poor Curly. Sudden shiverings seized him, the mind, vanquished at last, began to wander from earth—whither who can dare to say?—dark-blue shadows deepened under his hollow eyes, the life in him still lingered, as though loth to leave the form so brief a space ago full of such beautiful youth, such gracious manhood; to watch it flickering, struggling, growing fainter and fainter, ebbing away so slowly, so surely, dying out painfully, reluctantly, and to know that it might all have been spared by the common care that at home would be given to a horse, to a dog. God knows, there are sights and thoughts in this world that might well turn men into fiends. He gave one sigh, one heavy sigh deep drawn, and turned upon his side: "My mother—Alma!" Those were the last words he uttered; then—all light died out of his eyes, and the life so young, so brave, so gallant, had fled away forever. De Vigne bent over the reeking straw that was now the funeral bier of as loyal a heart as ever spent itself in England's cause; and bitter tears, wrung from his proud eyes, fell on the cold brow, and the closed features that never more



would light up with the kind, fond, fearless smile of friendship, truth, and welcome.

“I loved him,” he muttered. “God help me! Such is ever my fate! My mother—Alma—Curly—all lost! And no bullet will come to me!”

In his own arms De Vigne bore Curly out from the loathsome charnel-house, where the living had been entombed with the dead. We buried him with many another, as loyal and gallant as he, who had died on the slope of the Great Redan; and we gave him a soldier’s gravestone: a plain white wood cross with his name and his regiment marked upon it, such as were planted in thick, those two long years, on the hills and valleys of the Crimea. God knows if it be there now, or if the Russian peasant has not struck it down and leveled the little mound with his plowshare and the hoofs of his heavy oxen. We have left him in his distant grave. England, whom he remembered in his death-hour, has forgotten him long ere this. Like many another soldier lying in the green sierras of Spain, among the pathless jungle of the tropics, amid the golden corn of Waterloo, and the white headstones upon Cathcart’s Hill, the country for which he fell scarcely heard his name, and never heeded his fate. There he lies in his distant grave, the white and gleaming city he died to win stately and restored to all her ancient beauty, the waters of the Alma rolling through its vineyards as peacefully as though no streams of blood had ever mingled with its flow; the waves of the Euxine Sea bearing slowly on the Crimean sands a requiem for the buried dead. There he lies in his distant grave; God requite England if ever she forget him and those who braved his danger, found his death, and shared his grave.

## II.

## HOW INCONSTANCY WAS VOTED A VIRTUE.

THERE was a ball at the Tuileries. The bells had fired, and the bonfires blazed upward through the still September night in dear old England for the fall of Sebastopol; and M. Louis Napoléon, in imitation of the holy men of old, had been to his *Te Deum* in Notre-Dame, making much of his Mamelon Vert to a populace whom his uncle had won with Mont Tabor and Arcola. There was a ball at the Tuileries, that stately palace that has seen so many dynasties and so many generations, from the polished Pairs de France gathered round the courtly and brilliant Bourbons, to the Maréchaux roturiers, with their strong swords and their broad accents, crowding about the Petit Caporal, taking camp tone into palace salons. There were that night all the English élite, of course, in honor of the "alliance;" and there was among the other foreign guests one Prince Carl Wilhelm Theodore Vallenstein-Seidlitz, an Austrian, with an infinitesimal duchy and a magnificent figure, a tall, strong fellow, with the blue eyes and fair hair of the Teuton race, a man of few words and only two passions: the one for belles tailles, the other for gros jeu.

He had been exchanging a few monosyllables with the Empress, and now leant against the wall of one of the other reception-rooms, regarding, with calm admiration, the beauty of the Duchess d'Albe, until his attention wandered to a new face that he had not seen before, and he turned to a young fellow belonging to the British Legation, and demanded, with more consideration of brevity than of grammar, "Qui?"

"Ma sœur, mon Prince."

"Ciel! quelle taille; pas grande, mais quelle taille!"

With which, for him, warm encomium, Prince Carl stroked his blonde moustaches and studied her silently for five minutes. Then he asked another question:

"Pourquoi est-ce que je ne l'ai jamais vue?"

"Parceque vous n'êtes pas arrivé à Paris, que depuis huit jours; et parceque'elle est diablement éprisé d'un homme marié, qui est dans la Crimée, et, si c'était permis par ma mère; elle ne voudrait pas aller dans le monde."

The Austrian shrugged his shoulders.

"Hein! Un homme marié! Comme les femmes aiment les pommes defendues! Introduisez moi, mon cher, je la ferai l'oublier."

So Rushbrooke Molyneux introduced the Duke of Valenstein-Seidlitz to his sister, and the bold Teuton eyes fastened on Violet with delight at that belle taille, whose grace and outline eclipsed all he had ever seen. I am not sure that a casual observer would have noticed any change in our brilliant belle. The eyes had lost their riant and cloudless regard; the soft rose hue upon her cheeks was altered to an excited flush at times, a marble pallor at others; and the smile that had before been so spontaneous and so heartfelt, now faded off her lips the moment courtesy ceased to require it. Beyond that, there was little alteration. At her years the most bitter curse upon the mind does not always stamp itself upon the features, and though Violet never affected a gayety which her heart refused, and did not care who saw that, while Sabretasche was in danger, she shrank from all scenes of pleasure and distraction, she knew that she was pitied and that he was blamed, and that knowledge was sufficient to rouse her Irish spirit to face the world, which would only have amused itself with her sorrow and taken occasion for fresh condemnation of him,

so—she let the wolf gnaw at her vitals, but closed her soft, girlish lips with the heroism of the Spartan, and suffered no word of pain to escape them which might be construed into a reproach to him.

Vallenstein looked on her belle taille, and on her lovely face, never noticing the weary depths in the eyes that seemed "looking afar off," and the haughty chillness of tone into which Violet, surrounded with men who would willingly have taught her to forget, had unconsciously fallen in self-defense; but thought to himself, as he drove away to a less formal and well-nigh as gorgeous an entertainment in a cabinet particulier at Véfours: "Qui le diable est ce peste d'homme marié? N'importe! Je la ferai l'oublier." And Lady Molyneux, too, thought, as her maid unfastened her diamond tiara: "If the cards are played well, I may make Violet Duchess of Vallenstein-Seidlitz. It would be the best match of the season. His hotel here is very fine, and Madame de la Hanteville says his Viennese palace is charming. What a pity it seems Sabretasche has never had anything happen to him!—if he were not in that Crimea alive to write her letters and feed this romance, I could soon bring her to reason. However, as it is, a great deal may be done by firmness; I am glad Rushbrooke is so intimate with Vallenstein; Rushbrooke has just such views, *he* will never throw himself away for love—if I could only persuade Violet how utterly unnecessary a grande passion is—indeed, in marriage, positively inconvenient! She will outgrow her romance, of course; still it is time we put an end to it, some way or other. Her dresses mount up very expensively. I *must* have that lace—only three hundred guineas, dirt cheap! and I don't believe the women will let me have it unless I pay part of their bill, tiresome creatures. I paid them up every farthing seven years ago, but that sort of persons grow so

rude now-a-days, instead of being thankful for one's custom, that it is utterly insufferable. I must certainly marry Violet to somebody, and I will not procrastinate about it any longer. I shall be firm with her!"

With which resolution my lady sharply bade her *femme de chambre* be quick and brush out her hair, and composed herself to her slumbers till Jeanne and the *chocolatière* and a French novel should arouse her at noon: while on the other side of the partition-wall that divided their chambers, Violet, an hour ago the belle of imperial salons, with her graceful languor, and her matchless loveliness, and her glittering court dress, lay on her couch, her long hair unbound, her pillows wet with bitter tears, pouring out all her soul in passionate prayer, and sinking at last into the slumber of exhaustion, with his letters clasped tightly in her hands, till the gleam of the morning sun, shining in through the *persiennes* on her cheeks, found the tears still wet upon them, while the lips that had so often touched his were still murmuring *Sabretasche's* name.

The Molyneux had come to winter in Paris. Corallyne, though it looked well enough in Burke, was utterly uninhabitable; London was out of the question till March, and the Viscountess, tired of traveling, and bored with the Bads, had taken a suite in a hotel in the *Champs Elysées*, where, between her French acquaintance and her English connections, the fashionable Chapels and the Boulevard, the Opera-Comique and the *jeunesse dorée*, the shops and her own *petit soupers*, she contrived to spend her days tolerably pleasantly, especially as there was a remarkably handsome Confessor of her friend Madame de la Hauteville's, who gave her unusual piquancy in her religious excitements, and made her think seriously of the duties of auricular confession. (It is commonly said that

women make the best devotees—doubtless for causes too lengthy to enter upon here—but I wonder, if religions had no priests, how many of their fairer disciples would they retain?) And now, Lady Molyneux had another object in life—to woo Prince Carl for her daughter. Bent on that purpose, she tried to make the Hôtel Clâchy very delightful to him, and succeeded. Violet paid him no attention—barely as much as courtesy dictated to a man of his rank and to her father's guest—but he cared nothing for conversation, and as long as she sat there, however haughtily silent, and he could admire her belle taille as he liked, he wished for no words, though he might have desired a few smiles. Still she was the first woman who had neglected him, and to men as courted as the Austrian that is a better spur than any, and he really grew interested when he found it not so easy “*de la faire oublier l'absent.*”

“C'est en bon train,” thought my lady; “if only Violet were more tractable, and Sabretasche would not write!”—would not *live* was in her thoughts, but naturally so religiously-minded a woman could hardly “murder with a wish,” and, having no other weapons than her natural ones of tongue and thought, planned out a series of ingenious persecutions against her daughter till she had induced her to marry either Regalia, who had followed them to Paris, or the Duke of Vallenstein. She rather preferred the latter, because the little German Court, could she transplant Violet thither, would be too far away for men to compare disadvantageously, as they did now, the *passé* with the perfect beauty. It is very inconvenient for a handsome coquette woman to have constantly beside her one twenty years younger, who waltzes better than herself, and needs no *cosmetiques*.

“My dear Violet, oblige me with a few minutes' conversation,” said my lady, one morning.

Violet looked up and followed her passively; her manner was as soft and gentle as of old—even gentler still to those about her—but the chill of her great grief was upon her, and her mother's persistence in teasing her to go into society, or to receive attentions which to Violet seemed semi-infidelity to Sabretasche, had taught her a somewhat haughty reserve quite foreign to her nature, in defense not only of herself, but of the allegiance, which she never attempted to conceal, that she gave to him as faithfully as though he had been her husband.

"My dear Violet," began the Viscountess, seating herself opposite to her daughter in her own room, "may I ask whether you absolutely intend dedicating all your days to Vivian Sabretasche? Do you really mean to devote yourself to maidenhood all your life because one man happens not to be able to marry you?"

The color rose on Violet's white brow; the sensitive wound shrank at any touch, how much more so from one coarse and unfeeling; and my Lady Molyneux, religious and gentle woman though she was, could use Belgravian Billingsgate on occasion. The blood mounted over her daughter's pale features; she answered with involuntary hauteur:

"Why do you renew that subject? You know as well as I that, unless I marry Colonel Sabretasche, I shall never marry any one. It is a subject which concerns no one but myself, and I have told you, once for all, that I hold myself as fully bound to him as if the vows we hoped to take had passed between us!"

Her voice trembled as she spoke, though her teeth were set together. Her mother was the last person upon earth to whom she could speak either of herself or of Sabretasche. The Viscountess sighed and sneered *en même temps*.

"Then do you mean that you will refuse Regalia?"

"I have refused him."

"You have!" And my lady, with a smile, drank a little eau-de-Cologne by way of refreshment after hearing such a statement. "I suppose you know, Violet, that you will have no money; that if you do not make a good match now you are young and pretty, nobody will take you when you are the dowerless passé daughter of a penniless Irish Peer? And Vallenstein-Seidlitz, may I inquire if you have refused *him*, too?"

"He has not given me the opportunity; if he do, I shall."

"If he do, you will? You must be mad—absolutely mad!" cried her mother, too horrified for expression. "Don't you know that there is not a girl in the English, or the French, or the Austrian empire, who would not take such an offer as his, and accept it with thanksgiving? The Vallenstein diamonds are something magnificent; he is a thorough Parisien in his tastes, most perfect style, and——"

"Oh yes! I could not sell myself to better advantage!"

"Sell yourself?" repeated the peeress. Fine ladies are not often fond of hearing things called by their proper names.

"Yes, sell myself," repeated Violet, bitterly, leaning against the mantle-piece, with a painful smile upon her lips. "Would you not put me up to auction, knock me down to the highest bidder? Marriage is the mart, mothers the auctioneers, and he who bids the highest wins. Women are like racers, brought up only to run for cups, and win handicaps for their owners."

"Nonsense!" said her mother, impatiently. "You have lost your senses, I think. There is no question of 'selling,' as you term it. Marriage is a social compact, of course,



where alliances suitable in position, birth, and wealth, are studied. Why should you pretend to be wiser than all the rest of the world? Most amiable and excellent women have married without thinking love a necessary ingredient. Why should you object to a good alliance if it be a marriage de convenance?"

"Because I consider a marriage de convenance the most gross of all social falsehood. You prostitute the most sacred vows and outrage the closest ties; you carry a lie to your husband's heart and home. You marry him for his money or his rank, and simulate an attachment for him that you know to be hypocrisy. You stand before God's altar with an untruth upon your lips, and either share an unhallowed barter, or deceive and trick an affection that loves and honors you. The Quadroon girl sold in the slave-market is not so utterly polluted as the woman free, educated, and enlightened, who barter herself for a 'marriage for position.'"

Something of her old passionate eloquence was roused in her, as she spoke with contempt and bitterness. Her heart was sick of the follies and conventionalities that surrounded her, so meshing her in that it needed both spirit and endurance to keep free and true amid them all. Lady Molyneux was silent for a minute, possibly in astonishment at this novel view of that usual desideratum—a marriage for position.

"My dear Violet, your views are very singular—very extraordinary. You are much too free of thought for your age. If you had listened to me once before, you would never have had the misery of your present unhappy infatuation. But *do* listen to me now, my dear—do be sensible. The eye of society is upon you; you must act with dignity; society demands it of you. You must not disgrace your family by pining after a married man. It

was very sad, I know—very sad that affair; and I dare say you were very attached to him. Everybody knows he was a most handsome, gifted, fascinating creature, though, alas! utterly worldly, utterly unprincipled. Still, even if you suffered, I think your first feeling should have been one of intense thankfulness at being preserved from the fate you might have had. Only fancy if his wife had not declared her claims before your marriage with him! Only fancy, my dear Violet, what your position in society would have been! Every one would have pitied you, of course, but not a creature could have visited you!”

The silent scorn in her daughter's eyes made her pause; she could not but read the contempt of her own doctrines in them, which Violet felt too deeply to put into words.

“I have no doubt it was a very great trial,” she continued, hurriedly; “I am not denying that, of course; still, what I mean is, that your duty, your moral duty, Violet, was, as soon as you found that Vivian Sabretasche was the husband of another, to do your very utmost to forget him, certainly not to foster and cherish his memory as persistently and willfully as you do. It is an entire twelvemonth since you parted from him, and yet, instead of trying to banish all remembrance of your unhappy engagement and breaking entirely with him, you keep up a correspondence with him—more foolish your father to allow it!—and obstinately refuse to do what any girl would be only too happy to do who had been the subject of as much gossip as you have been of late,—form a more fortunate attachment, and marry well. I tell you that your affection for Colonel Sabretasche, however legitimate its commencement, became wrong, morally wrong—a sin to be striven against with every means in your power, as soon as you learned that he was married to another woman.”

At last the Viscountess paused for breath; the scorn

which had been gathering deeper and deeper in Violet's face burst into words; she lifted her head, that her mother might not see the thick blinding tears that gathered in her eyes:

"A sin? To love *him*! with the love God himself has created in us—the noblest, best, least selfish part of all our natures! You cannot mean what you say! The sin, if you like, were indeed to forsake him and forget him; *that* were a crime, of which, if I were capable, you would indeed have reason to blush for me. When I know him noble in heart and character, worthy of every sacrifice that any woman could make him, so true and generous that he chose misery for himself rather than falsehood toward me, am I then to turn round and say to him, 'Because you cannot marry me—in other words, give me a good income, home, and social position, contribute to my own aggrandizement, and flatter my own self-love, I choose to forget all that has passed between us, to ignore all the oaths of fidelity and affection I once vowed to you, and sell whatever charms I have to some buyer free to bid a better price for them?'"

The satiric bitterness in her tone stung her mother into shame, or as faint an approach to it as she could feel, and, like most people, she covered an indefensible argument with vague irritation.

"Really, Violet, your tone is highly unbecoming toward me: if you own no obedience to a parent, you might at the least show a little respect for the opinion of a person of so much larger experience than yourself. I have absolutely no patience with your folly——"

Violet stopped her with a gesture as of physical suffering, but with a dignity in her face that awed even her mother into silence.

"Not even you shall ever apply such a term to any de-

votion I can show to him. He is worthy all the deepest love of a woman far nobler and better than I ever shall be, whose only title to such a heart as his is that I hold him dearer than my own life. I promised him my allegiance once when the world smiled upon our love; because the world now frowns instead, do you suppose that I shall withdraw it? Do not torture me any more with this cruel discussion; it is ended once for all. I shall *never* marry any other; it will always be as useless to urge me as it is useless now. God knows whether we may ever meet again; but, living or dead, I am forever bound to him."

Every vestige of color fled from her face as she spoke; her small white fingers were clasped together till her rings cut into the skin; there was an utter despair, a passionate tenderness in her voice, which might have touched into sympathy, one would have thought, even the coldest nature. But (I do not think one can blame my Lady Molyneux; if she was born without feelings, perhaps she was hardly more responsible for the non-possession of them than the idiot for the total absence of brain) her mother was not touched, not even silenced, by the sight of the suffering, which, though she checked its utterance, was only too easily read on Violet's face and in her voice.

"Is that your final decision?" she said, with a sneer. "Very well, then! I will tell Vallenstein that my daughter intends to lead a semi-conventual life, with the celibacy, but not the holy purpose, of a nun, because she is dying with love for a handsome *roné* who happens to be a married man. I dare say he will enjoy telling the story at the Tuileries, and there are plenty of women, my love, who will like nothing better than a laugh against *you*."

"You can say what you please," answered Violet between her teeth.

But that she was her mother, the Viscountess would have had a far sharper retort.

"Of course I can! And stories grow strangely in passing from mouth to mouth! Dear me, is it three o'clock? And I was to be at Notre-Dame by half-past, to hear that divine creature, Alexis Dupont!" And my lady floated from the room, while her daughter leant her head upon the mantle-piece, the tears she had forced back while in her mother's presence falling hot and thick on the chill marble—not more chill than the natures that surrounded her in the gay world of which she was so weary. Her heart was sick within her, the burden of her life grew heavier than she knew how to bear.

"Vivian, Vivian, why did you leave me, why did you forsake me? Would to God that I were near you! Any fate were better than this—any fate, any fate! Would to God that I could die with you!" burst from her lips, while the form that Vollenstein coveted shook with uncontrollable sobs.

How long she stood there she did not know; her thoughts were all centered on that inexorable misery of absence, which stretched like a great gulf between those two, so formed to make each other not only happy, but tenderer, nobler, better, as two lives each incomplete without the other may well become when blended into one. How long she stood there she did not know, till hands as soft as her own touched hers, a face as fair as her own was lifted to hers, a voice whispered gently to her, "Why do you talk of dying? For you, of all, life should be bright and beautiful!" Violet lifted her head with a faint smile; she had not heard her entrance; a volume lay open by chance on a table beside her, and she pointed at the passage that was on the open page:

To feel that thirst and hunger of our soul  
We cannot still, that longing, that wild impulse,  
And struggle after something we have not  
And cannot have; the effort to be strong,  
And, like the Spartan boy, to smile and smile  
While secret wounds do bleed beneath our cloaks,  
All this the dead feel not—the dead alone!  
Would I were with them!

“Do you not understand that, Alma?”

“Do I not!”

Alma spoke with that passionate vehemence natural to her, which, while her dark-blue eyes grew darker still, with a grief in them more sad than tears, expressed in those three little words how much of sympathy, suffering, and despair! In their long intercourse, which had been the intercourse of friends rather than that usual in their relative positions, the tenderest chord in the heart of both had never been touched; each of them would have shrunk from unveiling what was most sacred and most near, and the love which they felt was never desecrated by being pulled out as public wares, and tainted by the sentimental atmosphere of “confidences.”

Violet, struck by her tone, looked down at her, forgetting for the moment her own sorrow: in Alma's passionate eyes perhaps she read a history similar to her own; perhaps she guessed that Alma's association with De Vigne had not been broken without a wrench, to one of the two at least; probably she thought that he, whom she had only known satirical, and to all appearance utterly unimpressible, had won the girl's love carelessly, and cared nothing for her in return. At least she saw enough to tell her that she was not the only one who suffered, and, moved by a sudden impulse of pity, Violet Molyneux stooped and touched with her lips the white arched brow that had once flushed beneath De Vigne's caresses.

"Alma, you are the only woman I have ever met who thought and felt as I do; tell me, what do *you* call fidelity?"

"Fidelity?" repeated Alma, with that instantaneous flash of responsive feeling on her mobile features which it had been De Vigne's pleasure to summon up and watch at his will. "There is little of it in the world, I fancy. A marriage is to me null and void without fidelity, not only of act, but of thought, of mind, of heart; and fidelity, however wide the distance, however great the severance, makes in God's sight a marriage tie holier than any man can forge, and one which no human laws can sever. What do I call fidelity? I think it is to keep faithful through good report and evil report, through suffering, and, if need be, through shame; it is to credit no evil of the one loved from other lips, and if told that such evil is true by his own, to blot it out as though it never had been; to keep true to him through all appearances, however against him, through silence and absence and trial; never to forsake him even by one thought, and to brave all the world to serve him; that is what seems fidelity to me,—nothing less—nothing less!"

Her eyes flashed, her lips quivered, her thoughts were with De Vigne. A tender love, an undying sorrow, were spoken on every feature of her expressive face, as, turned full to Violet, the sunlight fell upon it; showing the shadow beneath the eyes, the passion in them, the weary thought on her brow and lips, which love for De Vigne had stamped there.

Violet looked at her and sighed; she was too unselfish not to regret, even amid her own sorrow, that another should share a similar fate; and she felt little doubt either that De Vigne cared nothing for his former protégée, or *that* he had left her, with his love unspoken, but his mar-

riage told. She liked the depth of feeling and delicacy of nature which made Alma, impulsive and demonstrative as she was, hold her attachment to him too sacredly to speak of it, and hear his name, when it was occasionally mentioned in the Molyneux circle, without betraying "the secret wound beneath the cloak," loving the hand that had given that wound too well to murmur to others at its pain. The similarity of nature and of fate touched Violet. Absorbed as she was in her own bitter trial, she had liked the Little Tressillian, and felt a sensation of rest and sympathy when with her which she found with no other in the whirl of her fashionable and heartless home; but now she felt almost affection for her, the first warmth of feeling into which she had been roused since the deadly blight of severance and suffering had fallen on her brilliant life. Softer tears than those that had burned in her eyes before stood in them as she looked at her. She stooped over Alma as she sat on a low chair, her head bent, her thoughts far away, and passed her jeweled hand over the golden hair that De Vigne had drawn through his fingers, those shining silken threads that had held him closer than chains of iron.

"You are right! We must give 'nothing less.'"

Alma, for answer, threw her arms round Violet and kissed her with all the fervor which no sorrow could wholly chill out of her half Southern nature—the first warm, fond caresses which had touched Violet's lips since Sabretasche was parted from her. That was all that passed between them then or afterward on what lay nearest to the hearts of both, yet that little was enough to awake a strange sympathy between them, none the less real because it was silent. Poor little Alma! life was bitter enough to her now. Twelve months had passed; she was still as far from De Vigne as when she lay chained to her sick-bed in Reuben's cottage. The letter she had written at Montres-



sor's had miscarried; De Vigne had never had it. Hearing nothing from him, she had written again, passionately, imploringly, a letter that would have touched a heart far harder and more steeled against her than his: that shared the fate of many others that winter; many others that lay in the bottom of the harbor, or went Heaven knows where, while we were wearily waiting for them to bring something of the old familiar light from the Christmas fires at home into our cheerless tents. Undaunted, she wrote a third time. That letter she received back, sealed again, and directed to her in a writing that she knew but too well, firmly, boldly, with not a trace allowed to appear in the clear caligraphy of the passionate agony in which the words were penned. She knew *then* that he believed her false to him, that he accredited that horrible impossibility that she had forsaken him and fled with Vane Castleton; that the circumstantial evidence which had told so strongly against her had crushed out all faith and trust and tenderness in his heart toward her. It was the most cruel wound Alma had ever had, to find herself so readily doubted, so harshly given up, so unjustly denied even a hearing. "I would never have believed evil against him if all the world had sworn it to me!" she thought, her proud and high-spirited nature stung by the doubt and the injustice from him to whose full faith she knew she had so full a right. Injustice was always very bitter to her; it roused all that was dark and fiery in her character. From anybody else she would never have forgotten or pardoned it; certainly never have stooped to clear herself from it. It was the strongest proof of all of the intensity and self-oblivion of her love for De Vigne, that she forgave him even his ready suspicion of her fidelity, and thought less of her own wrong and suffering than of all she knew he endured in thinking her—his own darling, to whose lips his love caresses had

clung so passionately that warm summer night when they had last parted—false and worthless, lost to him forever.

But as I have said, Alma, with all her impulsiveness and expansiveness to De Vigne, never wore her heart on her lips; on the contrary, she was more reserved and silent on the things that were dearest and deepest to her than any one would have fancied from her frank, gay, childlike exterior. She was as sensitive as he to all touch of those more delicate mimosas that she sheltered in her heart; over them she was haughty, proud, reserved; deep feeling, whether her own or another's, was too sacred to her to be dragged out into daylight. She had, moreover, like all strong natures, great self-control and reticence. De Vigne's name was too dear to her to be breathed before others. She had resided twelve months with the Molyneux, and they never knew, though he was often mentioned casually, that his name merely spoken by another's voice sent those bitter tears to her heart which were too deeply seated to gather to her eyes.

Alma's principles of honor and of trust were far more acute and refined than those of most people; to her a tacit confidence was the same as a spoken bond; the love De Vigne had lavished on her in those few hours, when their hearts had throbbed as one, was sacred to her—a gift, a trust, a treasure reposed in her alone, not to be spread out before other eyes. It was his secret, his heart that she would have revealed, his confidence that she would have betrayed in bringing forward to others that love for him which for her own part she would have proudly and gladly avowed to all the world if needs be. Violet, the only one who would have guessed the bond there was between Alma and the Crimea, who would have translated the dilated terror of her eyes when the morning papers came in, the pallid anguish of her face when she bent over the Returns

of killed and wounded, the darker gleam of her eyes whenever De Vigne's name was mentioned by any of their set, or by some man who had come back from the Crimea from ill health or to bring dispatches, Violet was too absorbed in her own thoughts to notice what passed beside her, or at least to reflect or to muse upon it. She was pleased, as much so as the great grief that had so suddenly shadowed her life would allow her to rouse herself to be in anything, when she saw in the companion it had been her mother's fancy to procure, the Little Tressillian, the girl artist, whom she had introduced at the ball in Lowndes Square, and whom she had once blindly and laughingly envied. She was kind to her, as Violet would at any time have been to any one in a subordinate situation; still more so to one in whom she recognized a nature as proud, as delicate, as high-bred as her own, and to whom she had always had a certain attraction ever since she had heard of her as the artist of the Louis Dix-sept.

It was a peculiar position that Alma occupied in the Molyneux household, which was now—for some time, at the least—located in Paris. All of them, except Violet, had looked upon her as an employé and a subordinate, to be treated accordingly. The Hon. Rushbrooke, attaché to the British Legation, admiring her chevelure dorée, had thought he could make much the same love to her as to his mother's maid, whenever that soubrette chanced to be a pretty one; Lady Molyneux had scarcely ever spoken to her, save when, struck with Alma's great taste in dress, she would fain have had her turned into a sort of chef de toilette. But the Little Tressillian, conscious in herself of as good birth and breeding as any one of them, was quite able, clinging and childlike as she was in many things, to hold her own, and to make people treat her with *the respect and dignity she merited by blood, by talent, by*

manners, by all save money. One worthy of De Vigne's love, she thought, was certainly worthy to be treated as an equal by these people; her haughty reserve and resentment of Rushbrooke's attentions quickly sent that youth into dudgeon, and he would probably have joined the Trefusis and Vane Castleton in calling her "a little devil;" Jockey Jack vowed she was as much 'of a lady as any of them; swore he'd known Tressillian in early days,—by George, he *would* have them civil to the little girl, and was civil to her himself, in his bluff, blunt, kindly-meant way; even my lady was brought down to chill but decent politeness to her, by reverencing her in her secret heart for the art by which she managed to dress so prettily upon nothing; and Violet, won toward her as months passed on by that similarity and congeniality of heart and character which we had always noticed between them, was very kind to her, and gladly sought refuge in her society from the inanities, frivolities, scandals, and manœuvres constantly poured into her ears by her mother, and from the whirl of a circle whose gayeties were now so foreign to her and so repugnant; until a tacit sympathy and a sincere regard grew up between them—the friendless artiste and the fashionable belle.

## PART THE TWENTY-THIRD.

## I.

## ALL THAT FIDELITY COST.

It was Christmas night—Christmas-eve—and the midnight mass was rising and falling in its solemn chant through the long aisles of Notre-Dame. The incense floated upward to the dim vaulted roof, the starry lights glittered on the gorgeous high altar, while the sweet swell of the cathedral choir rose on the still, hushed air, as through Paris, under the winter stars, there tolled one by one the twelve strokes of the midnight hour.

Midnight mass in Notre-Dame!—it were hard to hear it bursting in its glorious harmony, its sonorous rhythm, after the dead silence of the assembled multitude, bursting at once from priest and people, choir and altar, without something of that poetry, that sadness, that veneration which lie in us, though lost and silenced in the fret and hurry of life—vague, intangible, subdued, as the last lingering notes of the Miserere.

One by one the midnight strokes tolled slowly out upon the Christmas air; hushed as though no human heart beat among them, the gathered thousands knelt in prayer; the last stroke fell and lingered on their ears, and then, over their bowed heads, the rich cadence of the choir and the full swell of the organ notes rolled their richest harmonies of praise and supplication. Among the multitude knelt Violet Molyneux and Alma Tressillian, their thoughts far from creeds or formularies, from religious differences or religious credulities, but their hearts bowed in prayer more

agonized, more fervent, more passionate in its beseeching earnestness, for those far distant that they loved so well, than any that went up to Heaven from the frail suffering humanity gathered there in the cathedral of Notre-Dame. What was to them church, place, religion? thus they prayed in the solitude of their own chambers; thus they would have prayed beside the sick-beds of Scutari; thus they now prayed in the hushed aisles of a cathedral, where, if forms differed, human hearts at least beat beside them and around, with hopes, fears, griefs, passions, trembling, quivering, pleading for mercy, as in theirs!

As they passed out of the great door to the carriage, they looked up to the still heavens, with the midnight stars shining calm and bright in the great cathedral of Nature, and in Violet's eyes stood heavy tears, wrung from her love so tender and so mournful; while Alma's, tearless and burning with the passion that only grew stronger with each hour of doubt and absence, glanced wildly up to those distant stars, which from their spheres looked down on him! Both started, as a voice whispered by their sides:

"Per Carita! date la limosina per amor del Figlio di Dio!"

They scarcely saw the beggar's face, coming out of the gas glare into the moonlit night, but they heard the voice, broken, almost fierce—perhaps with hunger!—in its supplication, and both instinctively, and contrary to the custom of either, stretched out their hands with an alms on Christmas-eve. As it chanced, Alma was the nearer to the suppliant, who caught her offered gift, but did not see Violet's. The crowd following, pushed them on; their carriage rolled away, while the woman, with Alma's coin in her hand, looked after them with a strange expression on her haggard face, partly curiosity, partly hate, partly fear, yet with a tinge of regret and pain as she muttered, in Tuscan:

"Santa Maria! questo sorriso mi fa pensare di gli! E presagio della morte—ma—per chi?"

The wild gaze of the Italian's fierce dark eyes, the haunting tone of that shrill "Carita! Carita!" still lingered in Alma's mind as she rolled through the gay gas-lighted streets of Paris, and her young eyes closed with a despairing sigh and a sickening shudder of dread, at this mysterious Human Life, which is so short in years, so long in suffering.

The Paris winter passed; passed as Paris winters ever do, with a gay whirl of glittering life for the rich, with cold, and hunger, and suffering for the poor; the gas flowers of Mabilie burning at the same hour with the candle that gleamed its sickly light on the dead bodies at the Morgue. The Paris winter passed, and Violet Molyneux was still the belle of its soirées; that chill hauteur which in self-defense she had assumed, was no barrier between her and the love that was pressed upon her from all quarters and highest ranks, evident as it was, by her equable coldness to all, that unless she ever married Vivian Sabretasche that exquisite loveliness would never be given to any man. Lady Molyneux did not distress herself so pitifully at this obstinacy as she had done before, for Prince Carl was not a man to be frightened by a girl's repulse; he daily grew more entêté of that "jolie taille" which had first drawn all that Vollenstein could conceive a grande passion needed to be. He called perseveringly; he came as regularly as clock-work to their carriage in the Boulevards or the Pré Catalan; he listened without a yawn to those songs which made the Parisians sigh that Violet could not be a prima donna—from all these the Viscountess argued that, with her own good management, the hand of Vollenstein-Seidlitz would ere long be offered to Violet, and then my lady, who

did not believe in any resolution strong enough to withstand a principality and gentle coercion, flattered herself that she should give checkmate to the person of all others she most disliked—Vivian Sabretasche.

She was not mistaken. In February, Lord Molyneux received a letter with the stately royal seal of the Vallenstein-Seidlitz, requesting the honor of his daughter's hand. It came to him when they were at dinner; even with the length of the table between them, his wife knew, or thought she knew, the armorial bearings of the seal, as it lay upward unopened, and congratulated herself with a rapid cast forward as to how many hundreds the trousseau would cost; but then the trousseau would be one final expense, and Violet's dress, in the present state of things, was an annual destruction of what without her my lady would have had for her own silks and laces, jewelry and point. As they took their coffee, preparatory to their going to a ball in the Champs Elysées, at Madame de la Vieillecour's superb hotel, Jockey Jack broke the seal, perused the missive with his spectacles on, and in silence handed it to his daughter. Violet read it, with pain, for she foresaw that she should not be allowed to reject this, as she had done others, without contention and upbraiding, and gave it back to him as silently; but the thin, jeweled hand of her mother intercepted it, with a snappish sneer:

"Is your own wife, Lord Molyneux, to be excluded from all your confidences with your daughter?"

"What answer, Vy?" asked Jockey Jack, turning a deaf ear to his lady, who had a knack of bringing forward her relationship to him on any disagreeable occasion, such as opening his notes or referring her creditors to him, but on all others ignored it very completely.

"The same as usual, papa," answered Violet, bending



down to him as she rose to set her coffee-cup on a console.

Lady Molyneux read Vallenstein's formal and courtly letter with calm deliberation through her gold eye-glass; and Alma rose and left the room, guessing, with her intuitive tact and delicacy of perception, that this was some matter which they would prefer to discuss alone. Lady Molyneux read the letter, then folded it up and put it in its envelope.

"Violet, would it be too much for me to ask to be allowed to share the confidence you gave your papa just now? Might I inquire what reply you send to Vallenstein?"

Violet gave one sigh of inexpressible weariness; she was so tired of this ceaseless contention, the continual dropping of water on a stone; this jangling and upbraiding; more trying, perhaps, than more active persecution to a mind that, like hers, was infinitely above it, a temper that was singularly sweet, and tastes that revolted from the low-toned worship of position, and the utter incapability of understanding any warmer or deeper feeling, which stamped all her mother's conversation, with what was to Violet's a species of vulgarity, good ton though Helena Lady Molyneux—a Lady in her own right—might be. She lifted her eyes with that low broken sigh, forced out of her by the martyrdom of daily petty badgering and polished vituperation.

"Certainly you may, mamma. I thank Prince Carl for the honor he has done me; and I reject his offer with all the gratitude for his generosity that it merits."

Lady Molyneux shrugged her shoulders, and did not condescend to answer her. She turned to her husband, who was beating an impatient tattoo on the back of his couch.

"My dear Molyneux, do *you* intend, too, to refuse Prince Carl's proposals?"

Jockey Jack looked up with a curse on women's tongues and on their tomfoolery of marriage and giving in marriage; fond as he was in his way and proud of his daughter, he wished in his soul that Vy had been born red-haired, sal-low, or cross-eyed, rather than have her beauty bring these men's bother and his wife's perorations eternally about his ears; he would have liked to see Violet well married certainly, but if she was so exceptional as to have a distaste that way, why, the girl was young enough to wait if she chose; she would outgrow her fanciful fidelity to Sabretasche — though he was a noble fellow, certainly. He looked up, ready to dissent from his wife at a moment's notice.

"Vollenstein does not propose for *me*, my dear. I have nothing to do with it, except to tell him, as decently as I can, that Vy is very much obliged to him, but would rather be excused."

"Then you mean to countenance her in her folly?"

"I don't know what you mean by countenancing her; she is old enough to judge for herself, especially about her own husband. I dare say a royal marriage would have had great attractions for you, Helena, but if your daughter thinks differently there is no reason for you to quarrel about it," said Jockey Jack, who did not see why one man was not as good as another to Violet, nor yet if they were not why she should be bullied about it.

"I see, if you do not," said his wife, frigidly. "No, Violet, do not leave the room, I beg; I wish to speak to you on this subject. It is of the greatest importance that she should marry soon and marry well. The singularly unfortunate circumstances that attended her lamentable engagement—an engagement that would never have been

entered into if I had been listened to—have laid her open to a great deal of remark, and to be an object of such bavardage is never beneficial to any woman——”

“Do you speak feelingly?” interrupted Lord Molyneux, *sotto voce*.

“Indeed, very prejudicial to a young girl in the outset of life,” continued his wife, imperturbably. “Violet has now been out three years; girls that were *débutantes* with her have settled well long ago. Beatrice Carteret, with not a tithe of her advantages, married the Duke of St. Orme in her first season; and that remarkably ordinary little Selina Albany drew Whitebait into a proposal, and he settled a hundred thousand upon her for pin-money——”

“That’ll do, that’ll do,” cut in Lord Molyneux, impatiently. “St. Orme is an old brute, who bullied his first wife into consumption, and as for Whitebait, he’s a young fool, whom his uncle tried to get shut up for idiocy; if Vy can’t do better than that, I would rather she lived and died a Molyneux. If you’ve no better arguments for marriage, Helena——”

“At all events,” said my lady, with her nastiest sneer, “they would either of them make as good husbands as your favorite would have done with a wife *in petto*! And at all events, Beatrice and Lady Whitebait have taken good positions in society—positions to be envied by all their acquaintance, and to gratify their mothers’ fondest wishes; Violet, on the contrary, as she must be perfectly aware herself, with double their beauty, talent, and attractions, has done nothing—absolutely nothing! She has been immensely admired; she has made more conquests, I have no doubt, than any woman of her years; but men will not go and recount their own rejections; other ladies will not believe me when I tell them whom she might have married—very naturally, too—and all the world knows of

her is her devotion to a married man! I leave it to her own sense to determine whether that is a very advantageous report to cling to her in circles where women dislike her as their rival, and men whom she has rejected are not very likely to be over-merciful in their terms of speaking of her. Of course it is all hushed when I draw near, but I have overheard more than one remark very detrimental to her. In a little time men will become very shy of making one their wife whose name has been so long in connection with a married man's, and whose ridiculous dévouement to Colonel Sabretasche has been the most amusing theme in salons where he has been so famous for love not quite so constant! Therefore, I say it is most important she should marry soon, and marry well; and to reject such proposals as Prince Carl's would be madness—a man who could wed, if he chose, with one of the royal houses of Europe! If you, Lord Molyneux, are so unwise, so ill-judging, as to uphold your daughter in such a course of folly, I shall do my best to oppose it. A letter of refusal shall never be sent to Vallenstein."

"Eh! well, I'm sure I don't know," said poor Jockey Jack, bewildered with this lengthened lecture. "Come, Vy, your mamma speaks reasonably—for once! You know I am very much attached to Sabretasche—very much—and I admit you don't see any other man so handsome or so accomplished, and all that sort of thing; and he was deuced mad about you, poor fellow! But then, you see, my dear child, as long as there's that confounded wife of his in the way, and her life's just as good as his, he can't marry you, Vy, with our devilish laws; and, ten to one, if ever the time come that he can, he won't care a straw about you—that's very much the way with us men—and you'll have wasted all your youth and your beauty for nothing, my poor pet! You see, Vy, we are not rich, and if you were

well married—it's most women's ambition, at the least! Come, Vy, what do you say?"

Violet rose and leaned against the console, with her head erect, her little pearly teeth set tight, her lips closed in a haughty, scornful curve over them, her face very pale—pale, but resolute as Eponina's or Gertrude von der Wart's—and I think the martyrdom of endurance is worse than the martyrdom of action!

"I say what I am weary of saying—that it is useless, and will ever be useless, to urge me to the sin of infidelity, which you raise into a virtue because it is expedient! Let me alone!—it is all I ask. I go into society because you desire it; it is hard that you will persecute me on the one subject which is the most painful of all to me. Let me alone!—what I may suffer, I never intrude upon you. If you wish to be free from me—if I cost you anything you grudge—only allow me to work for myself—to go into the world where, for your sake, I am not known, and, under another name, gain money for myself; I have often been told my voice would bring me more wealth than I should need. Only give me permission, I will never complain; but consent to be given over to Vollenstein, or any other man, I will not! To be sold by you to the highest bidder—to be forced into a union I should loathe—to be compelled to a lie—to worse than a lie, to perjured vows—to a marriage that would be infidelity to both! I know what you mean: an unwedded daughter is an expense, and, as society counts, somewhat a discredit. If you feel it so, I am willing to support myself; if you allowed it, I should find no shame in that; but, once for all, I *swear*, that unless God will that I should ever marry him whom I love and honor, I will be no man's wife. If you care nothing for my peace, if you will not listen to my prayers, if you *will not* pity me in my trial—at least, you will not seek to *make me break my oath!*"

With that strange calm which fixed and hopeless sorrow sometimes gives to those who bear it, Violet spoke—on her beautiful face a sighing scorn for those who would make her disloyal to him whom they once had sanctioned as her husband, mingled with that deep despair, that unspeakable tenderness which marked her love, so strong, so mournful. On her face was the stamp of that heroism, endurance, and power of sacrifice which had lain unseen in her character, and which had never been brought out in her brilliant, glittering, and happy life, till her love had called it up in all its strength. It was far above the comprehension and the sympathy of those who listened to her, as most things high and beautiful, noble and earnest, are above the understanding of the many. To how few of the thousands passing through the gas-lit streets of this city to-night do the stars above head whisper anything of their poetry, their mystery, their solemnity!

Jockey Jack rose from his seat, and left the room; the girl's face had touched him; yet he felt it was his duty to upbraid her for her folly; but he had not the heart to do it, and he felt a choking in his throat, and—true Englishman!—left the room, ashamed of the emotion which showed that all good and generous things were not wholly dead within him. And Lady Molyneux was neither touched nor softened, having little that was good and generous left in her after her intrigues, her liaisons, her cancons, her sneers at romance, her study of expediency, her forty years of dress and fashionable life, but poured out upon her daughter more cruel words—not of hot honest anger, but of cold sneering insolence, mockery, and upbraiding—than I care to repeat from the lips of a lady of the best ton and the most eminent religion.

It was difficult to wound Violet more deeply than she had already done. She listened passively;—men and wo-

men cannot, like the lama, summon death to their relief when their burden grows heavier than they can bear;—she listened passively, not deigning to reiterate her resolution, keeping down bitter responses with an effort that did her honor, solely because she knew it was her mother who spoke. When she had finished, she bent her head to her and passed out of the room; a silent rebuke which stung her mother into something touching upon shame, or rather mortification, for, though she had most words, she felt she had not victory, though she said, and meant it, that before long her daughter should wed prince Carl of Vallenstein-Seidlitz. What would be a broken oath more or less to her? Helena Lady Molyneux had broken many in her day—many besides her marriage ones! Violet found her way mechanically into the nearest chamber—the morning-room apportioned to her and Alma. Dizzy and deaf still with that pitiless avalanche of words, she threw herself on a couch—not to weep, her eyes were dry; but she laid her forehead down on the curved arm of the sofa with a low, faint cry, as if in bodily pain that had worn out all strength—even strength to complain.

At the ball at Madame de la Vieillecour's that night all beauty paled before hers; men looking on it would have given ten years of their lives to win one smile from those lovely eyes, to have made one blush glow on that pure, colorless cheek; young, unnoticed débutantes looked at her as she passed them, with that crowd gathered round her which everywhere lingered on her steps, and wished, with all the envy of women and all the fervor of their years, that they were she—the belle of Paris—that exquisite Violet Molyneux, in whose praise there was not one dissentient voice, in whom the most fastidious and hypercritical could not find a flaw. If they had seen the *reverse* picture, the Queen of Society without that crown

which was so weary a weight upon her aching brows— if they had seen her that night, the flowers off her luxuriant hair, the glittering jewels off her arms, kneeling there beside her bedside in solitude, which no human eyes profaned, they would have paused before they envied Violet Molyneux, courted, followed, worshiped as she was. If the world went home with most of us, I fear it would have sadder stories to tell than the cancons and the grivois tales in which its heart delights; the lips that sing our gayest barcarolles in society often have barely strength enough to murmur a broken prayer in the solitude of their lonely hours, when the mask is off and the green curtain is down.

I think it is usually those who have the deepest feeling who show it the least to those around, and uncongenial to them. The languid air, the absorbed abstraction, the careless attire, the eyes "in a fine frenzy rolling," belong rather to that melancholy which is "only for wantonness," that sentimentality of sorrow which displays its mourning shield with ostentation that courts observance, and lets its sorrows off in sonnets and iambics. With strong passions is usually strong self-command. No people are more passionate, or, for that matter, more demonstrative, than the Italians—yet, when they wish, no people know better how to smile while the iron is in their soul or the dagger at their throat. A school-girl, with a passing cloud on her romance-idylls, will sentimentalize by the hour together, sit apart with tearful eyes, and publish her misery and her martyrdom to the world in general, and to her own choice confidants in minute detail. A woman, whose life is wrecked by a worthless love or brutal husband, who carries a cross on her heart to which the iron-spiked cross of the devotee were rest and ease, goes out into the world with a smile upon her lips, lest her sadness seen should seem to reproach others, who, if cruel, are still dear to her. A



boy, with his first sorrow, will wander with woful visage and unkempt hair, read Werter and Locksley Hall, parade it with a certain pride and pleasure in his own melancholy, and spoil a dozen trees with cutting initials on their bark. Ten or twenty years later he hides with jealous care the curse that gnaws his life-strings—is too weary of the wear and tear of grief not to court oblivion of, rather than to nurse, his bitter cares; and, if it be some one loved and lost, through whom his life is darkened, he holds it as too sacred for the eyes of other men to spy it out shrined in the holiest of holies.

In Alma Tressillian, also, in proportion to the strength and fervor of her passion for De Vigne, were the jealousy and tenderness with which she kept the secret of that love so dear to her. There was a great deal of strength in her character; her enthusiasm, her fervent feeling, her imaginative powers, her perseverance, her affections, were not only vehement, but they were strong, deep, and lasting. Alma's was not the ordinary feminine love, warm, but too often evanescent; it was the passion of a woman of vivid brain, fervid affections, and impassioned character—with all that childlike and frank demonstrativeness natural to her youth, her truthful nature, and that candid expression of all she felt and thought, in which she had been brought up by Boughton Tressillian. If I need to tell you how bitterly she suffered during all the months she was with the Molyneux, I must have utterly failed in making you understand the character of De Vigne's last love. All her thoughts, sleeping and waking, were with him; not an hour passed but she breathed a passionate prayer to Heaven for his life and his safety; her heart grew sick, and the blood rushed in torrents to her brain with the simplest mention of the Crimea. His silence after the reception of her first letter, the return of the second in his own handwriting, had shown

her that he still disbelieved her—still doubted the love that pleaded in such burning accents to him—still held her, his own Alma, who worshiped him so singly and entirely, who for a few brief hours had nestled in his arms and listened to his vows—as the false, heartless, fickle, valueless, hateful thing, for whom no contempt could have been too great, no insult undeserved, no chastisement from his hand unmerited. Alma knew him; she knew the harsh, cold skepticism which made him so ready to believe against her, and which steeled his heart against her prayers; but though written words might fail to touch him and convince him, she felt that together, with her eyes on his, face to face, and heart to heart, he would believe her, or he should slay her at his feet; she would never let him go till he listened to her story and gave her back his love. Till she could meet him, each day, each hour, seemed a cycle of time that held her in its iron bonds and would not let her free. She had but one aim, one end—to realize money sufficient to take her to the Crimea.

For that one end Alma worked unwearyingly. Just before her illness a lady had offered her twenty guineas for a water-color of Evangeline finding Gabriel, with a pen and-ink sketch of which she had been pleased when she visited Alma's old painting-room at St. Crucis. To finish this picture, a large one, thirty inches by fifteen, Alma had given every moment of her time since she had been with the Molyneux. She had risen early and had sat late, declining all the amusement which Violet would have given her; refusing to accompany them in their drives as often as she could, consistent with the duties Lady Molyneux expected of her, which I can assure you were not lax, and might have been almost menial but for Violet's interference and Alma's haughty refusal. Toward the summer of '55 she had finished it, sent it to the lady, who was a sister

of Leila Puffdoff's, and chanced to be in Paris at the time, and received an order for a companion-picture, the subject being left to herself. Greatly to her mother's annoyance, Violet had introduced Alma's talent into notice among the dilettanti of Paris. Many were ready to admire anything that would win them favor with the English beauty; others really saw and were struck with (as Sabretasche and the cognoscenti in general had been in London) the wonderful dash and vitality in her outlines, the delicacy and brilliance of her coloring; orders in plenty were given her, more than she could have completed in a dozen years, and Alma excluded herself from the society into which her own genius and Violet's patronage would have introduced her—society at another time so congenial to all the Little Tressillian's tastes and leanings, for she was born to shine and rule in society; and, like all conquerors, male and female, loved her scepter and her dais—that she might work, work with her art and her hands, and her rich glowing imagination, till she had money to take her to the Crimea to tell Sir Folko all—to win him back, or die. Poor little Alma! how few “win back” all that makes their life's glory, what-  
ever stake it be; yet we live—live to the full age of human life. When we woo death, he comes not; when we bar the chamber-door, then he enters with his chill breath and stealthy step.

It was the beginning of April; the chestnuts of the Tuileries were just thrusting out their first green buds, bringing to Alma's thoughts those chestnut-boughs at her old nurse's home, under whose leafy shadows in the sunshine of two summers past she had drank so deeply of that fatal cup, whose delirium is more rapturous and whose awakening more bitter than the dreams of the opium-eater. Her hoard was completed. Never did miser gaze on his *treasures*, never wife on her husband's ransom, never cap-

tive on the warrant of his freedom, never author on the darlings of his brain, with fonder rapture, with more grateful tears, than Alma on the money won by her own hands, which was to bear her to him, to Granville, to Sir Folko. The thousand miles seemed now but as a span; love would cross all the lands, bridge all the seas, that parted her from him. She would go to him, she would find him; she would risk all to see him once again, to kneel at his feet, to swear to him she was his, and his alone; to force him to believe her, to wrest from him those words, so fond, so passionate, so tender, which she had heard but once, and which her whole soul thirsted to hear again, as the dying in the desert thirst for one drop from the water-brook to lave their parching throats and cool their burning brows. That he could have changed to her never crossed her mind, she loved him so faithfully herself! The strength of his passion, as it had spent itself upon her in those few short hours, had struck answering chords in her own heart; she felt how madly, how deeply this man loved her, even as she loved him; she suspected change in him no more than in herself; that he disbelieved her, that he thought, despite all she had told him, that she had fled with Van Castleton, she *did* believe. All the hard sarcasms, all the chill skepticism that she had heard him fling at the world and at her sex made her comprehend how he might love yet still suspect her, and to wrest him back out of that sea of disbelief, to force him to look down into her eyes and there read all the truth, Alma would have braved more than a journey across those weary miles which parted her from him; and I believe that, young, delicate, susceptible in some things to terror as she was, her courage, and her spirit, and her endurance would have brought her through, no matter what danger or privation, till she had reached De Vigne.

Alma looked at her precious gold that was to take her to his side, that was to give him back to her—her lover, her idol. At last it was won—won by the head and hand for the service of the heart that was chained down, its high thoughts clogged, its beating wings fettered, its spirit bruised, but never beaten, by the curse of—want of money. It was won; the modern god without whose aid human life may struggle and fall and rise again, and again struggle and again fall, and go down at the last—quivering, trembling, dying from the unequal fight of right against might, talent against wealth, honesty against expediency, for all the world may care. It was won; and not an hour longer should any human force keep her from that distant goal whither for twenty weary moons her heart had turned so constantly. She locked her money in a secret drawer, (she—generous as the winds—had grown as careful of that treasure as any hoarding Dives!) and left her room to seek Violet Molyneux and tell her she must leave her. A warm friendship had grown up between them, not that fond and entire attachment which, girl-like, they might have felt had they met three or four years before, when their thoughts were free from care and their hearts had known no passion, but still a true affection the one for the other, arisen partly from their similarity of fate, of which neither spoke, yet both were conscious. It was impossible for Alma not to be grateful to Violet for the generous delicacy, the tact, the kindness with which she smoothed away all that her mother would have made painful in the position of any employee of hers; and Violet, with her, escaped from all the worldliness, the false-heartedness, the uncongeniality that surrounded her, and grew fond of her, as all who knew the Little Tressilian were wont to do, even despite themselves, won by her noble, liberal intellect, her passionate loving heart, her *winning*, impulsive, graceful “ways,”—natural to her as its

song to a bird, its vivacity to a kitten, its play in the evening wind to a flower. Involuntary and unconsciously they clung to one another—the two true hearts amid so many that were false.

She sat down in the inner drawing-room. She did not see Violet, and supposed her to be in her own boudoir, where the belle of Paris spent each day until two, denied to all, often in penning those letters, transcripts of the heart, which were Sabretasche's only solace through those long Crimean nights.

Suddenly, however, she heard Rushbrooke Molyneux's voice in the outer room; she did not like him, and he called her, like Vane Castleton, a "little devil," because when he had admired her beaux yeux bleus, and had tried to make such love to her as he thought her position in his family warranted, Alma's hauteur to him, and the keen satire with which the little lady knew how to take care of herself very well, and to hit hard where she did not admire the style of attention paid to her, had annoyed the young attaché exceedingly, and irremediably wounded his amour propre.

"Vy, am I a good shot?" he was saying.

"You know you are," answered his sister's voice; she was probably surprised at so irrelevant a question.

"Very well; then if you won't marry Vallenstein—the Dashers, you see, are coming home, and as soon as Colonel Sabretasche is in England I shall challenge him; he will meet me, and I shall shoot him here—just here, Vy—where life ceases instantaneously."

A low cry of horror burst from his sister's lips. Alma involuntarily looked into the room; she saw that Violet had started from her brother's side, her face blanched with amazement, and her eyes fastened on him with the fascina-

tion and the loathing with which a bird gazes up into a snake's green fiery eyes.

"Rushbrooke! Great Heaven! you would stain your hand with murder?"

"Murder? What an idea! Dueling is legitimate, *ma sœur*, in this country at least; and I dare say your lover will find his way to Paris, though he is such a 'man of honor.' Listen to me, Vy; seriously, you must be mad to be taking the veil, as it were, for a fellow who can't marry you—for the best of all reasons, that he is another woman's husband. It's the greatest tomfoolery one ever heard. Why shouldn't you do like any other girl—send this bosh of romance to the devil and settle well. Any woman going would be wild to have a chance of winning Vallenstein. I should say so! He's rich enough, I can tell you; and the corbeille he can give his bride, if he likes, will be fit for an empress. What the deuce can you object to in him? He's an out-and-out better match than we could have looked for; and he'll be a very facile-going husband, Violet; and if you have such a fancy for the Colonel, Vallenstein will be an easy enough husband after a little time, and you can invite Sabretasche to your court——"

The bitter, unutterable scorn stamped on his sister's face stopped him in his speech.

"God help me! if my own brother tempt me to double dishonor!"

These words broke from her almost unconsciously. She deigned no answer to him, but stood looking at him with such loathing and contempt in her lustrous eyes, such dignity on her pale features, full of the scorn she felt, that Rushbrooke Molyneux, though he was far gone in shamelessness, shrank before it.

But like many such natures, coward at heart, he could bully a woman.

"Well, young lady, will you marry my friend Prince Carl, or not?"

"I have told you once for all—*no!*"

Violet stood, her head just turned over her shoulder to him as she was about to leave the room; her calm, resolute, contemptuous tone stung him into irritation. Rushbrooke had set his heart on his sister's becoming Vallenstein's wife, for certain pecuniary reasons of his own.

"You are quite determined? Then I shoot Sabretasche dead four-and-twenty hours after I see him next. Come, Vy, choose; the wedding-ring for yourself, or the grave for your lover?"

He meant what he said—for the time at least. Violet knew that he was utterly unscrupulous; that in the Bois du Boulogne, Rushbrooke, not long ago, had mortally wounded a young fellow in one of the régimens de famille, for having unwittingly rivaled him at a bal de l'opéra with a demoiselle little worth fighting about. She knew that Rushbrooke was quite capable—if he wished to revenge himself on her for not marrying—of doing all he said, and more, if he threatened it. Her love for Sabretasche subdued her pride; in the frenzy of the moment she turned back and caught both her brother's hands:

"Rushbrooke! are you utterly merciless—utterly brutal? Not to save my own life would I condescend to kneel to you; but to save his I would stoop lower, were it possible. But never will I break my faith to him; I know that this moment he would choose murder from you rather than infidelity from me. If you take his life, you take mine; my existence is bound with his—you will scarcely brand yourself a fratricide?"

Her voice, her face, might have touched a heart of stone; but the young attaché was rather impervious to



any feeling at all, being cast much in his mother's mould. He laughed.

"Splendid acting, Vy. You always did act well, though; you played in the Belvoir theatricals when you were only ten, I remember. Come, think better of it; marry Vallenstein, and your idol is safe from me. If you boast your love is so great, you might surely save the man's life."

"God help me!" moaned Violet.

"Will you marry Prince Carl?"

"No!"

"You will 'murder' Vivian Sabretasche then, as you term it?"

Another cry burst from Violet's lips, forced out as from a woman on the rack of the Star Chamber or the Inquisition. Then she lifted her eyes to him—those lovely eyes that the Parisians compared to summer stars—with deep dark circles under them, her face full of unutterable anguish, but with a strange nobility upon it.

"I would rather leave him in God's hands than yours. He will protect him from you! I have told you I will never break my faith to him!"

"Very well! I will go and have a look at my pistols," smiled her brother, as he rose.

But Violet's courage gave way, she fell heavily forward on a couch.

"My beloved! my beloved! God knows I would give my life for yours, but torture me how they may they shall never make me false to you, Vivian. You would not wish it—you would not wish it, darling—not to save your life——"

Alma could stay no longer; with one bound, like a young panther, she was into the room and kneeling beside Violet, while she turned her beaming, flashing eyes, full of their azure fire, upon Violet's brother.

"She gave you your right title. Fratricide! You are more than that, you are a brute; and were I of your own sex I would make you feel it, boasted duelist, or rather murderer, though you be. What is your sister's marriage to you, that you should seek to force her into a union that she loathes? Prince Carl himself would cry shame on you for seeking to win him a wife by such foul means, instead of honoring her for her love and truth—love and truth such as few men, indeed, are worthy. Go, Mr. Molyneux, go, and never come near your sister till you come to ask her pardon for your inhuman words and dastard act."

With all her old passion, Alma spoke like a little Pytho-ness in her wrath; those dark-blue eyes flashing and gleaming upon Rushbrooke Molyneux. He, who had never seen her roused, was struck with new and far hotter admiration. That short-lived passion of hers was singularly witching to men: it had been so to De Vigne, to poor Curly, to Vane Castleton; it was so now to Rushbrooke Molyneux. Yet she humbled him. He was mortified, conscience-stricken; every one of her words brought a flush of shame to his cheek, hardened though he was in his early youth; and he forgot that it was his mother's dependent who spoke to him thus, whom he should have cowed with a word and threatened with dismissal. He was only conscious that it was a woman more fascinating than any he had ever seen; a woman of nobler heart, of larger mind, of stronger courage than his own, before whose anger and contempt he shrank away ashamed.

He left the room, murmuring something of Vollenstein, his friend—devotedly attached—Violet's unfortunate attachment—only meant to frighten her, of course—nothing more—nothing more. Then he backed out, and Alma knelt beside Violet Molyneux, honoring her, loving her beyond all praise for her steadfast and unshaken love for

Sabretasche, and Violet threw her arms round her and held her close, as though clinging to some human thing in her desolation and despair. Then she lifted her face, pale, with deepened circles beneath her eyes, and a painful tremulousness on the lips, yet with something proud and stately in the midst of her anguish :

"Alma, I have not forgotten your definition of fidelity!"

The unutterably sad and tender smile with which she spoke struck to her listener's heart; from that hour she loved Violet Molyneux with one of the few and fervent attachments of her life, and she looked up at her with an answering regard that seemed to Violet like an angel promise and prophecy for the future :

"Violet, to those who are thus faithful reward will come!"

Violet tried to smile again, but her lips quivered in the effort, and she rose and left the room, while Alma, seizing the paper that Rushbrooke had flung down, tore it apart with breathless haste, remembering young Molyneux's words, "The Dashers are coming home."

It was true; we were leaving at last that land of many glorious and many bitter memories, and Alma read: "The —th Q. O. Lancers are ordered home from the Crimea, and left Balaklava on the 10th, in the transport *Eurydice*. This distinguished corps has played a very prominent part in the whole campaign; the gallantry of both its officers and men has been conspicuous, and for the dash and daring they displayed at the charge of Balaklava the commander-in-chief has recommended its commanding officers, Colonel Sabretasche and Major De Vigne, to her Most Gracious Majesty, with high encomiums. The Emperor and the Sultan have already forwarded them the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor and the Order of the Medjid, which the Queen has graciously accorded them her permission to

accept. Their own countrymen will not be backward in receiving these distinguished soldiers with the honors they so fully merit and have so ably won."

How many such paragraphs we read in the journals then! Now, as a civilian told me the other day, "the Crimea is such a long time ago; nobody thinks about it!"

No, nobody!—except Curly's mother and others like her, whose hearts are with the gallant dead that lie there, and whose every hope on earth was buried under those rough mounds that are now plowed down by the share of the Russian serf.

De Vigne had been much altered since Curly's death. The hot tears that had sprung into his haughty eyes over the dead form of his old Frestonhills pet had softened the fiery passions, and in a measure thawed the ice gathered in his heart. For the first time, despite his resolute and willful skepticism, a hope had dawned upon him that Alma might yet be true to him through all the circumstances that chimed in against her. He was slow to admit it one moment, the next he clung to it madly. Absence and time had in no degree lessened or cooled the passion that had flamed up so suddenly; on the contrary, with De Vigne's temperament it grew and strengthened, and faithless, hollow-hearted, worthless though he believed Alma to be, he knew that the sight of her face, the sound of her voice, would rouse him into fiercer madness, more blind love than ever. Curly's words had let in one ray of hope, and he cursed the headlong impetuosity which had made him send her letter back unopened. There was hope, and sometimes, as I say, De Vigne strove with all his force to shut it out, lest it should break in and fool him once again; at others he clung to it as men do to the only chance that makes their life of value. Heaven knows that if his love for Alma had been error, it brought him punishment

enough. Whichever way it turned, he saw enough to madden him. If she were false to him, his life would be one long and bitter curse to him; if he had judged her too harshly, and his neglect and cruelty had driven her to desperation, and sent her, young, unprotected, attractive as she was to men, into the chill world to battle with poverty, he shuddered to think what might have been her fate—so delicate, so trusting, so easily misunderstood; if she were true to him, across the heaven that opened to him with that hope there stretched the dark memory of the woman who bore his name.

Curly had loved her, not so passionately, but more faithfully; Curly had trusted her; Curly had thought how to provide for her, and secure her from poverty, no matter how low she were fallen; while he—he had given her up, full of his own grief, his own madness—he had left her in Vane Castleton's clutches, when, if true to the trust her adopted grandfather had put in him, he would have followed her to save her from her wretched fate, though to leave her himself forever; he had believed evil of her, while Curly had rejected it, knowing no more than himself, but simply from his faith in her, and his belief in her incapability to do anything that was false or wrong. Bitterly De Vigne reproached himself for the mad haste and the cruel skepticism which had made him send her back her letter unopened. With Curly's words, "If ever a woman loved man she loved you," there uprose all the fonder, tenderer springs of that passion which he had striven to crush out, and of which there had of late only raged all the fiercer and more bitter emotions. The sweet wild hope, faint though it was, came with a rush of all that delicious happiness which he had tasted during those brief evening hours at St. Crucis, and had lately given up every *hope* of ever knowing again. A flood of warmer, softer,

better feelings awoke in him, in the stead of that harsh, cold, cheerless creed that despair and deception had forced upon him. At times he would persuade himself that Alma must have loved him, that all those passionate vows that her fond words, her still fonder eyes had spoken to him, could not have been lies; at others, he would madden himself with horrible thoughts of all that must have chanced if Vane Castleton had her, an unwilling victim, in his clutches; at others, he would sum up together, with that strange skill at self-torture in which human nature so excels, all the chain of circumstances that seemed to point her out as hopelessly, irrevocably false. Chained to the Crimea—for De Vigne had much of the spirit of the old Greeks and Romans, and he would have construed a soldier's duty more like Leonidas of Sparta than like some modern militaires—he yet at times longed, as an eagle chained longs for its native aerie, to go back to England and find Alma once more, no matter how, no matter where, but to decide at once the doubt that maddened him—was she what he had first thought her, or was she what he shuddered to suppose her? Curly's words had roused him strangely, they had melted much of the bitterness, the fierceness, the fiery vengeful agony that had raged in his soul since that day when he had heard that Alma had flown with Vane Castleton. His strong agony of love for her had changed as near to hate as his nature, generous and inherently forgiving, would allow. If he could have loved her less he might have hated her less, but the more time rolled on, the longer grew the weary space since he had seen that beaming and impassioned face that had wooed him so resistlessly and left him so remorselessly, the stronger, the wider, the more ungovernable grew that last love of De Vigne's. He loved her, but with the love that slew Desdemona, that would have murdered Imogene; a love

fierce, mad, touching to hate, that would have periled all for one caress of hers, but would have sent her to her grave rather than have seen a rival's hand touch her, another's lips come near her; a love inexorable as death, that must have all or nothing.

But in those long winter nights, tossing on his camp bed, Curly's words, like voices from the grave, recurred ceaselessly to him, and as a burst of tears—anguish in itself—yet relieves the still fiercer suffering of the brain before, so gentler thoughts of Alma, a ray of hope, a gleam of trust, softened and relieved the bitter despair and hopeless agony of the past months. He had been so strong in his own strength and he had fallen, surely he might have pity on those who had erred—he at least might pause before he sat in judgment on another. Was his own past so pure, his own life so perfect, that he had any right to cast a stone at a woman, even though her error and her perfidy had blasted all his life? Sabretasche—the man who had openly avowed that he had little strength against temptation, whom the world asserted, and he himself never denied, to give way to every wayward impulse, every evanescent desire—had conquered himself, had resisted the heaven to gain which he must have wooed the woman he loved to that from which when she grew older she might wish to retrace her steps; he had consigned himself to suffering perpetual rather than lead her in her early youth where, later on, she might regret and reproach him; a sacrifice the nobler because Sabretasche was *almost* certain that the love he had won would never change and never turn against him. De Vigne remembered, with a pang, how Sabretasche had said to him, "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall," and how he had retorted, in the pride of his unassailed strength, that to win a young girl's love, bound and fettered as he was,

would be a blackguard's act; yet his strength had gone down before his love, and he had forgotten the ties that bound him, until, had she been true to him, it would have been useless to remember them. De Vigne had not yet learned to mistrust his own power to control himself, despite the misery which his headlong infatuation for the Trefusis had brought on his own head. He had believed that he had his passions under an iron rule, because, chilled by the deception of his marriage into an intense and unrelenting skepticism of all good in the sex of that woman who termed herself his wife, and separated, moreover, from all the higher class of women by years of active service in India, mingling with and only seeking the society of men, he had never been touched into that love which had already cost him so much that he had sworn never again to be betrayed by its Judas kiss. Thus, doubly armed by his resolution never to be beguiled by woman, and by his trust in his own honor, which he had fully and firmly believed to be a shield all-sufficient between himself and Alma Tressillian, he had gone on and on till the passion he had sworn with so much scorn to keep free from, all his life through, had taken him at an unwary moment, and thrown him as a skillful wrestler may throw one who has held the belt, with strength too confident and daring too careless, in unattacked security, for many years.

As he thought and thought, lying awake with bitter memories through those long Crimean nights, De Vigne's bitter and fiery passion, half love, half hate, which, had she come before him in those moods would have crushed her in one fierce embrace and then flung her from him forever, lost much of its harshness, its bitterness, and, purged from its hatred, yearned toward her with that deep, strong love for her which he had poured out so lavishly in those few brief hours during which their hearts



had beat as one. He thought more gently, more tenderly of her, poor child! She was so young!—and if she were false, had he always been constant? and if she had deceived him, were there not errors enough in his own life to bid him not take up the stone to cast at her? Widely tolerant ever, would he be harsh alone to the woman he had loved? The thought of her face, her fair young face, with its deep-blue, upraised, earnest eyes, and its golden waves of hair like netted sunbeams, and its wide-arched brow, where intellect and truth were writ so plainly and so nobly—of her soft young voice calling him “Sir Folko!” and whispering to him those innocent yet impassioned vows of an affection at once so pure and so deep—of those hours before a thought of love came between them, gay and bright with her joyous laugh and ringing repartee, and that interchange of graver tastes and nobler studies which had had so great a charm for him,—all these rose up before him, and drove away all harsh and cruel thought of her, and his heart recoiled from the fierce and vengeful emotions which had, born in love, bordered so close on hate. All that was noble, generous, gentle, awoke in De Vigne’s character, and there was very much, mingled with those fiery passions natural to all strong natures, and that bitter scorn which in all nobler ones is aroused by injustice, deceit, and wrong. He felt a very anguish of longing to look upon her once more; he loved her now with so great a love that he could have forgiven her all wrong to him, even though that wrong laid a curse upon his life that no weight of years could lift from it, no length of time efface. He loved her, no matter what she was. And is love anything short of that?—is love true and real unless it says, “However, love, thou art fallen, I will not shrink from thee?”

If she had been false to him, if she had been Vane Castleton's toy for the hour and the plaything of others since, he would try to find her, save her, shield her from her fate, even though to find her so and to leave her so broke his own heart. If she had been true to him and others had chicaned her, misled her, taken advantage of her youth, her guilelessness, he would find her so; and no matter into what depths of misery she had sunk, he would raise her up, avenge her, and if ever his name became his own again, give it, with his love and honor, to her in the sight of men. Across the darker passions of his soul gleamed the Pity and the Pardon he had once had need to ask of her. His love grew gentler, nobler, tenderer; and the heart so proud, so haughty, so secure in its own honor, yet ever so frank, generous, and prompt to justice, thought, amid the anguish of those still night-watches, "Who am I to sit in judgment on her or on any other?"

The order came for us to return home. Sabretasche heard it with mingled feelings; to be free to return to the same land with Violet Molyneux, to hear of her, perchance to see that beautiful face that had risen up before him even amid the din and crash and film of impending death at Balaklava, brought with it a sudden glow of all those warmer emotions which awoke in him, not to make him rejoice like other men, but to make him suffer. Yet he would fain have stayed there, with the enforced barrier of Distance between him and the woman whom fate forbade him.

De Vigne heard it with a wild rush of hope and fear; a stifling horror of dread of all he might learn in England; a tumultuous, rapturous hope, to which he scarce dare give life, struggling for pre-eminence; the great passions of his heart striving with each other; all overshadowed with the bitter curse that his love for both these women, the two arbiters of his life, had brought him.

At once he longed and dreaded to reach England. If Alma had loved him truly, and been misled by Vane Castleton's machinations, De Vigne felt that never could he expiate the selfish and skeptic haste with which he had condemned her; and already he shuddered at the burden of the dread remorse that would pursue him should he find that, for want of a strong hand and a true heart to defend her, that delicate child had fallen into the clutches of the man whom his fellow-men, no intolerant judges either, had termed Butcher, for his brutality to the women he sacrificed and then left to poverty and death! When he thought of Castleton and Alma by the new light that had dawned on him with Curly's words, he, strong man as he was, and cold as granite as he seemed to others to have grown, could have cried aloud in his great suffering, and at the horrible phantasma of what *might have been*; as he tossed through the weary hours of the night, great drops of anguish stood upon the brow which had never paled before death or danger, and he would awake from his fevered sleep, stretching his arms out to her and calling on her name, as she had called on his. The excitement and ceaseless fatigues, dangers, and requirements of the past campaign had kept him up and carried him on, but now—a few more months of the conflict between hope and fear he knew would be more than even he had strength to bear. He would find her, living or dead; he would seek for her as Evangeline for Gabriel, even though his heart might break at the end of that Pilgrimage of Love. De Vigne at last had learnt a lesson that he had never learnt before in all his life—he had learnt to love not only *for* himself, but better than himself.

But at Constantinople—he whom all the army called by his Indian sobriquet of the Charmed Life, whom shot and shell, death and danger, had alike spared; who had ridden

unharméd out of the fatal *mélée* before the guns of Bala-klava, though the last to leave those doomed and death-haunted lines; whom neither cold nor privation had harmed in any way; who had gone free amid the sickness that struck down his friends and soldiers by the score—at Constantinople De Vigne was chained on a sick-bed by the bitterest of all our Crimean foes—the cholera. It was touch and go with him then; his life was very nearly added to those ghastly Returns, which witnessed how much noble, gallant, manly human life was lost out there by mismanagement, red-tapeism, and procrastination. Thank God it was otherwise! the strength of his constitution pulled him through, but it had weakened him to the strength of a woman, and the Dashers sailed for England without him. I got leave to stay with him. If they had court-martialed me, they might have done. I would have been cashiered rather than leave the man I loved best on earth alone in the Scutari sick-wards in that pestilential place, that sounds so poetic and delicious with its long, lovely name, its Golden Horn, its glistening Bosphorus, its gleaming minarets, its Leilas, its Dudus, its bulbuls, and its beauty, but is, as all of us can witness, a very abomination for a sick man to dwell in, with its dirt, its fleas, its mosquitoes, its jabbering crowds chattering every lingo, its abominable little Turks, with their eternal "Bono Johnny," and its air rife with disease, malaria, and filth.

Sabretasche would have stayed, too, with him; the similarity of fate drew him closer toward De Vigne, as it bound Violet and Alma nearer together, and he, fettered to Sylvia da' Cerenci, felt all the warmer attachment, all the deeper pity for De Vigne fettered to the Trefusis; those two Hecates of their fate, to whom their impetuosity, their headlong, unthinking passion, their youth's thoughtless and ill-placed love, had chained them in their older years,

when heart and mind, taste and feeling, led them to others so different.

"No, no; go to England, Sabretasche," said De Vigne, signing the Colonel down toward him in one of his intervals of comparative ease. "Before long I hope to follow you, and you would do me much more service if you would—if you could—without bringing her name forward at all, learn something for me of——"

He stopped: he could not speak her name without a sharp spasm as of severe physical pain.

Sabretasche bent his head till his lips were close to De Vigne's ear; it was the first time he had heard him allude to her throughout the campaign.

"Of Alma Tressillian?" he said, softly.

De Vigne signed him assent, and a silent pressure of his hand was bond enough between him and Sabretasche. If Sabretasche had been like some eminent Christians of my acquaintance, he might have taken the occasion to exalt his own superior foresight in prophesying the trouble that would be born from De Vigne's careless intimacy with the Little Tressillian; being nothing more than a "bon camarade," with a generous mind, a kind heart, and a gentleman's tact, he felt no temptation to do anything of the kind.

The Dashers sailed for England. How few comparatively of the men that had left her shores returned to them! Poor Jemmy Pigott had been tumbled into a hastily-dug grave, a mass of blood, and blue and scarlet cloth, and gold lace, and human flesh, after Alma. Monckton had gone down at Balaklava, with his last sneer set on his marble features as though scoffing at death, never to soften till those features should be unrecognizable by friend or foe. Little Fan, the youngest cornet in the troop, had been left behind in that wild charge of ours; lying across his

horse, struck in two by a cannon-ball, with his sixteen years ended, and his gay boy's laugh hushed, and his girlish fair curls dabbled in Russian blood. Few enough of the men of '54 returned in '56; but what few there were, went homeward as cheerily as they had come out two years before, (they could not be more so,) save, indeed, their Colonel, whom no home awaited, whom no hope cheered, to whom no fond welcome, no tears of joy, no caresses lavished on him in breathless thanksgiving for all the dangers safely past would be allowed to him as to his fellow-men. Others went home to England with glad thoughts, fond dreams, and happy hours rising before them with the sight of those white familiar cliffs; some to a glad, thoughtless life of careless pleasure that would have gained new zest from deprivation; others to the revel and the sport, for which, blasé of them before, the stern realities, and harsh but noble trials of those long Crimean winters had brought them back their boyish taste; others to the happy English home, the bridal vows, the affianced wife's caress, all the sweeter after the perils past, all the dearer because the by-gone months had been spent, not in the chase of pleasure or the rose-leaves of luxury, but in manly efforts, in noble dangers, in the struggle for life and death, in the utter absence of all the aids, the pleasures, the agréments, and the surroundings which they, from their cradle upward, had been taught to look upon as absolute necessities. One man had his racing stud; another, his yacht, the pride and darling of his heart; another, his young bride, on whose pale lips he had pressed his farewell kiss almost ere the honeymoon had passed; another, his club, his lansquenet, his life in London, all he wanted or could wish for, since they held all his desires; another, to look into some loving eyes, out of whose depths he had seen all hope fade and die by the light of the summer stars,

sole witnesses of the parting they had thought might be eternal,—all had something to look forward to and long for, save Sabretasche, who had nothing but a love that must never be blessed—a fate that bade him not only suffer himself, but see, and know, and cause the suffering of the woman so unutterably dear to him.

The Dashers left for England, and De Vigne slowly recovered; slowly, for his fevered mind retarded the more rapid steps the strength of his constitution would otherwise have enabled him to take toward more than convalescence; convalescence—that state of being which people say, and maybe they are right, is desirable and delicious when your mind is at peace, your time is of no value, soft hands tend you, and sweet voices call you back to the Silent Land; but which, to my thinking, is about as exquisite torture as can be devised, when you grudge every moment that flies away and leaves you chained down into inaction, while you are longing, as a wounded charger hears the din of the battle and longs to rise up and rush on and mingle in the fray, to have your old strength back again, and to be up and doing what an hour's delay may, for aught you know, be undoing. This is what convalescence was to De Vigne, and, par conséquence, to anything better than convalescence he was much longer traveling than he would otherwise have been. To the strong man to be laid low; for the wayward and haughty will to be powerless to rise from that sick-bed; for the fiery impatient spirit to be held down by the weary chain of physical weakness—ah! I know it is easy to talk of submission, endurance, patience; but under some circumstances philosophy, under the fetters of illness and debility, requires more strength than people dream of or allow until they feel it.

Some three weeks after Ours had got under way for

England, I was sitting by De Vigne's couch reading to him from some of the periodicals my mother had sent me. It was Hamley of the Artillery's "Lady Lee," which ought to interest anybody if a novel ever can; but I doubt if De Vigne heard a word of it. He lay in one position; his head turned away from me, his eyes fixed on the light rosy eastern clouds, his right hand clinched hard upon the bed-clothes as though it would lift him perforce from that cruel inaction, as it had aided him so many times in life. I was glad that at that minute an old Indian comrade of his—come en route from Calcutta to England via Constantinople to have a look at the seat of war—was shown into his room, hoping that courtesy might rouse him more than Hamley's lively story had power to do.

The man was a major in the Cavalry, (Queen's—ça va sans dire,) of the name of De Vine—a resemblance near enough, I dare say, to justify Mrs. Malaprop and Co. in thinking them brothers, and the Herald's Office in making them out two branches of the same house. They were no such thing, however; the De Vignes of Vigne reigning alone in their glory among the woodlands of the southern counties, with their name as clear in the records of a thousand years back as the same type of feature is in all the portraits; while the De Vines were a Northumbrian race, whose great-grandfather, having made a couple of millions by wool, managed to get a baron's coronet, and the Heralds to find him a "De" for his monosyllabic Vine, and to his own dismay could trace himself by no manner of ingenuity higher up than Henry the Eighth, in whose kitchen on dit there was a Jarvis Vine, who played the part of scullery-man in real life, but who does admirably well to figure in archives as Sir Gervase De Vine, lord in waiting on his Most Gracious Majesty.

This present De Vine—a very good fellow, though as



Granville, with his characteristic republican theory and patrician leaning, once said with a laugh, he *does* come from below the salt—sat and chatted some time of their old Scinde reminiscences of camp stories and skirmishing, and friends dead and gone that they remembered in common; heartily sorry to see De Vigne knocked down as he was, and congratulating him warmly on the honors he had won—honors for which, in truth, though De Vigne cared very little as long as he had had the delight of fighting well, and was thought to “have done his duty,” as gallant Sir Colin (*Lord Clyde* will never be so dear a title to his army) phrases it; Granville was too true a soldier to look much beyond.

At last the man rose to go, and had bidden us good-by, when he turned back:

“I say, old fellow, I’ve forgotten the chief thing I came here to tell you. This letter of yours has been voyaging after me, sent from Calcutta to Delhi, and from Delhi to Rohilcunde, and God knows where, till it came to my hand about four months ago. I was just going to open it when I saw the *g* in the name, and the ‘Crimea,’ which the donkeys at the Post-office overlooked. You see your correspondent has put you Hussars, and as I’m in the Hussars and you’re in the Lancers, I suppose that led to the mistake. It’s a lady’s writing: I hope the delay’s been no damage to your fair friend, whoever she be. I dare say you have ’em by scores from a dozen different quarters, so this one has been no loss. By George! it’s seven o’clock, and I’m to dine at the embassy. Good night, old fellow! I shall come and see you to-morrow.”

Scrawled over with the different postscripts and addresses so that nothing of the original address was visible save the “Major De Vigne,” Alma’s writing was recognized by him ere it had left the other’s hand; almost

before the door had closed he wrenched it open, and turning away from me read the many close-written and tear-blotted pages that she had penned to him on her sick-bed at Montessor's,—pages teeming with love for him deep and fervent as that he felt for her, bringing him the assurance for which he would freely have laid down his life, that she was his in heart; his as he had loved to think of her, untouched, unspoiled, unharmed by any breath of falsehood or dishonor; his own, pure, true, safe from any other man's touch; unwon by any other man's vows; loyal to him through every trial, his, the last love of his life! Knowing he would wish to read on unwitnessed, I left the room.

He did read on, and, when he had read all, he thanked God, and, bowing his haughty head upon his hands, wept like a woman, all the passion, the tenderness, the anguish of his heart pouring itself out in that fiery rain of mingling ecstasy and woe, suffering and thanksgiving unutterable. Oh! that across that golden glory of happiness unspeakable, that in that hour of rapture so pure, so perfect, that between him and the joy just won, for which his heart went up to God in such trembling, such passionate gratitude—between him and the love that was his heritage and right as man—there should be the dark shadow, that too relentless phantom of his Marriage. It is bitter, Heaven knows, to be alone in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, with darkness around, with no ray of light to guide, no gleam of hope to aid us; but even more bitter than that is it to stand as he now stood, the sudden gleam and radiance of a sunshine that he must never grasp playing even at his very feet, flooding with warmth the air around him, yet leaving him chill, and cold, and shuddering, the more because he gazed on life and light;—it is more bitter to stand as he stood, looking on the

glories of a heaven upon earth which might, which would be his if he could stretch out his hand to take it; yet to look upon it chained to a granite rock; fettered by irons that long ago his own hands had forged; held by furies, the ghosts of his own headlong follies; denied the heaven that opened to his eyes, divided from it as by a great gulf; by the fell consequences of the past; his own passions their own Nemesis.

Would you know the poison that stung him so cruelly amid the cup of love so bright, so pure, so precious? It was this single passage in that letter of fondest trust and fervent words: "She told me she was your wife, Granville!—your wife!—that coarse, loud-voiced, cruel-eyed woman! But that at the moment I hated her so bitterly for her assumption, I could have laughed in her face! I could not help telling her it was a pity she did not learn the semblance of a lady to support her in her rôle; for I hated her so much, for daring, even in pretense, to take your name—to venture to claim *you*. If it was wrong, I could not help it: I love you so dearly that I could never bear even an imaginary rival. That woman your wife! Not even when she told me, not even when she showed me some paper or other she said was a marriage certificate, (I never saw one, I cannot tell whether it was at all like what she called it,) did a thought of belief in her story—which would have been disbelief in you—cross my mind for a moment; and when I discovered Vane Castleton's cruel plot, and saw so plainly how this woman must have been an emissary of his to try and wean me from you, I was so glad that I had never been disloyal to you even with a thought. I was so thankful, my own dearest, my own Sir Folko, my only friend, my idol ever, the only one on earth whom I love and who loves me, that even with that cruel woman's falsehood in my ears, I never for an

instant credited it; I trusted you too well ever to believe that you would have kept such a secret from me. I loved you too fondly to wrong you in your absence by want of that faith which it is your right to expect and mine to give!"

Those were the fond, innocent, noble words that stung him more fiercely than any dagger's thrust, and darkened, with midnight gloom, the joy that dawned for him with the recovery of his lost treasure—joy in itself so great that it was almost pain. This was the wound which that soft and childlike hand, that would have been itself cut off rather than harm him, struck him so unconsciously, even in the very words that vowed her love and gave her back to him. This is what chained him, Tantalus-like, from the heaven so long yearned for, now so near, but near only to mock his fetters, to elude his grasp. De Vigne was wayward, impetuous; he had carried all things before his own will; he had sacrificed all things to his own desires; he had paid dearly for his passionate impulses—perhaps he had made others pay dearly too; but, whatever errors might be in his life, errors of impulse, of headlong haste, of haughty self-reliance, De Vigne was utterly incapable of betraying trust, and to put faith in him was to disarm him at one blow; where doubt would only have iced, opposition only excited him.

That Alma should trust him thus—that he must stand before her and say, "Your faith was misplaced—that woman is my wife!"—God help him! his trial was very great.

## PART THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

## I.

## THE WIFE TO WHOM SABRETASCHE WAS BOUND.

It was April. The first chestnut-leaves of the Tuileries were silvered in the moonlight, and the dark Seine dashed onward under the gloomy bridges of the city, out under the wooded heights of fair St. Germain, where the old oaks that had listened to the love of Louise de la Vallière were thrusting out their earliest spring buds. It was a fair spring night, and the deep, calm heavens bent over Paris, as if in tenderness for the fair white city that lies in the valley of the Seine, like one of the gleaming lilies of its own exiled Bourbons. Around it, in the grand old chase of St. Cloud, in the leafy glades of St. Germain, in the deep forest aisles of Fontainebleau, among the silent terraces of Versailles and Neuilly, the spring night lay calm, still, hushed to the holy silence of the hour; in Paris, the city of intrigues, of pleasures, of blood, of laughter, of mirth, of death; of gay wit and fiery strife, of coarse brutality and exalted heroism; in Paris, the Paris of Mirabeau and André Chénier, of Rivarol and St. Just, of Marie Antoinette and Theroigne de Mirecourt; in Paris, the spring night was full of jests, and laughter, and merry chants de bivouac, while the gas-flowers of Mabilie gleamed and scintillated, and the Imperial household thronged the vacated palace of the D'Orléans, and the light-hearted crowd filled the Boulevards and the cafés; and women, with forms more lovely than their minds, were fêted in cabinets particuliers, and the music and the revelry rang

out from the Chaumière and the Château des Fleurs; and Paris was awake, crowned with flowers, with laughter on her lips and sparkling in her eyes, gay as a young girl at her first ball—gay as she has ever been, even on the eve of her darkest tragedies, her most terrible hours.

The soft spring night came down on Paris. Before the cheval-glass in her luxurious bed-chamber, with all the entourages of grace and refinement, with bright jewels on her hair, and her white cloud-like dress, and her priceless necklet of pink pearls, and her exquisite beauty, which other women envied so bitterly, stood the belle of its most aristocratic réunions—Violet Molyneux; shuddering, even while her maid clasped the bracelets on her arm for a ball at Madame de la Vieillecour's, at the memory of those cruel words from her brother's lips, which bade her choose between infidelity or death. At the window of her own room, looking up to the clear stars that seemed to gaze from their calm and holy stillness on the gay and feverish fret of the human life below, Alma Tressillian gazed on the spring night, her dark-blue eyes brilliant once again with the radiance of joy and hope; he was coming home—her lover, her idol, her worshiped "Sir Folko"—what could await her now but a return of that heaven once so rudely shivered from her grasp? Not very many yards off, in her crowded and bizarre boudoir, where finery stood the stead of taste, and over-loading passed for luxury, the Trefusis read the line in the English papers which announced the arrival of her law-termed husband's troop, and threw it with an oath to Lady Fantyre, that the Crimea had not rid her of his life, and left her mistress of the portion of his wealth that would have come to her—for the law would have recognized her rights as his "wife," and she was in difficulties and in debt. Underneath the windows, that shone bright with the wax-lights of Violet's

toilette-table, stood a woman, once as beautiful as she, but now haggard, tawdry, pitiful to look upon, with the stamp of a she-devil's furious temper on her features, begging of the passers-by for the coins that would procure her the sole thing she now loved or craved—a draught of absinthe; that deadly tempter, that sure, slow, relentless murderer who, Jael-like, soothes us for the moment to drive the iron nail into our brain while we slumber, and whom, madman-like, we seek and crave and thirst for, though we know the end is death. Those four women—how unlike they were! Dissimilar as night and dawn; as fragrant, spotless roses and dark, dank, deadly nightshade; as the two spirits that in fable and apologue hover over our path, the one to lead us to a Gehenna, the other to an Eden; dissimilar enough, God knows. Yet the same stars look down on them, the same men had loved them, and, in one chain of circumstance, Fate had bound and woven them together.

That same night Sabretasche arrived in Paris. Rumors had reached him of Violet's engagement to Prince Carl of Vollenstein-Seidlitz. Believe them for an instant he did not. Though his fate had taught him that delicate and satiric sneer at men and women, at the world and its ways, which made his soft voice and polished words so keen a weapon to strike, he was by nature singularly trustful and loyal, and, where he loved, believed, nor allowed hints, or doubt, or suspicion to creep in; nothing but her own words would have made him believe Violet had changed toward him, and, with those letters of hers breathing such tender and unalterable affection, he would have refused to credit any second-hand story of her which would have thrown a shadow of doubt upon her truth.

But the rumor of her projected union with Vollenstein struck him with a sudden and deadly chill; he realized for the first time the possibility that, one day, if he could not

claim her, another might; that another man might win what fate denied to him. He knew her family was proud, and, for their station, very poor; and though he trusted Violet's truth and honor too fully to believe she would give her beauty to another while her heart was his—though he believed her to have spirit, courage, and fidelity passing that of most women—though he knew that she would never, like some women, find consolation either in a brilliant position or in calmer affections, still—still—he knew what Lady Molyneux was. He remembered women who had loved, perhaps, as fondly as Violet, who had gone to their husbands' arms with hearts aching for another; and Sabretasche, despite his faith, trembled for the treasure of which another man might rob him any moment, and he have no right or power to avenge the theft! I know he *ought* to have rejoiced if Violet had been able to have found that happiness with some other which he was unable to give her—at least, so some romancists of a certain order, who draw an ideal and immaculate human nature, would tell us, I suppose—but Sabretasche was only mortal, as I have often told you, and before we can love quite so exquisitely I fear we shall have to ostracize love altogether. He cares but little for his jewel, who sees it gleaming in his rival's crown and does not long to tear it from his hated brows and hide it in his bosom, where no other eyes, save his own, shall see its radiance.

So Sabretasche went to Paris, as soon as his troop was landed at Southampton, to learn what truth or untruth there was in this report of Violet's marriage; to look—if unseen himself—once more upon his darling, before another's right should claim the beauty once his own. He had many friends in Paris, for he had often spent his furloughs in that fair city, where life is enjoyed so gayly, and wit current in its fullest perfection; and even as he reached



the station, a man he knew—the Marquis de St. Cloud—met him, and chatted with him some minutes of the Crimea, and of their mutual friends who had fallen at Inkermann and the Tchernaya.

“One of your compatriotes is the belle of our salons just now,” began M. de St. Cloud, who, having been long absent, attached to the French embassy at Vienna, had heard nothing of Sabretasche’s brief engagement. “We are consolidating the alliance by worshipping at an English shrine, and *parbleu!* Violet Molyneux would excuse any folly on anybody’s part. You know her, of course, *mon cher?* She is going to be married to that fool Vollenstein, who has gone into as great ecstasies as his German phlegm will allow about her *jolie taille*. However, you will know plenty about her before you have been four-and-twenty hours here, so I need not bore you beforehand. “*Ah! bon Dieu*, there is my train! I shall be back in two days. I am only going to Vivonne for a bear-hunt. *Au revoir!* I shall see plenty of you, I hope, when I return.”

Away went St. Cloud, in his carriage, and Sabretasche threw himself into a *fiacre* to drive to his accustomed locale, the Hôtel de Londres. The report was current, then, in Paris; and though he knew that reports are idle as the winds, based upon nothing very often, and circulating their poison without root or reason, still a sickening dread came over him; he felt as though, do what he would, a thousand mocking fates were leagued together to drag Violet from him; and he felt an imperative demand, a craving thirst to see her, to hear from her own lips whether or no she would be this man’s wife, against which he had no strength to contend. He must see her, and if she told him she could, without regret or lingering pain, wed Carl of Vollenstein, or any other, he would not curse her nor reproach her, poor child! he would have no

right to do so, and he would have loved her too well to do it if he had; but he would pray God to bless her, and then—leave her, and never look upon her face again.

It was nine o'clock—the still spring night slept softly, rocked on the boughs of the great belt of boulevard trees round Paris—when Sabretasche, alone, walked from the Hôtel de Londres to the house where the Molyneux lived in the Champs Elysées. He had stayed but a few minutes at his hotel; he had taken nothing scarcely since his chocolate at eleven; he could not rest till he had seen her again—his darling, whose fair face had been present to him in the silence of those long night-watches, only broken by the booming of the Russian cannon; whom he had longed so yearningly to see in all those weary months since he had parted from her—that terrible parting, on what should have been his marriage-day, when instead of his bridal caresses he had pressed his last kisses, his farewell to all hope, all joy on her lips, that were white with pain as she lay fainting in his arms, too dizzy with suffering to be wholly conscious of it.

His heart beat thick with a very anguish of longing as he drew near the house in which she dwelt. A carriage stood before the entrance, the door was wide open, the hall was bright with its wax-lights, the servants were moving to and fro, and in the full glare of the light, waiting for the fan she had forgotten, stood, on her father's arm, Violet—Violet, two years before his promised bride; and once more he beheld that form, that face, that with the din of war and death around had never for an hour ceased to haunt him with their surpassing loveliness. There she stood, unconscious of the eyes whose gaze she often thought would have power to recall her from the tomb; there she stood, with her white cloud-like dress, from whose gossamer folds that slight and perfect

form rose, like Aphrodite from the sea-foam; a narrow band of gold and pearls clasping her wavy chestnut hair; her large eyes darker and more brilliant still from the shadow beneath their lids; all that grace and fascination and delicate beauty about her which the Parisians merged in one word—*ravissante*; there she stood, and his brain reeled, and his heart beat with labored throbs, and he grasped the lamp-post to save himself from falling, as he looked upon the woman that he loved.

As he leaned there in the darkness, holding down with iron strength the mad impulse that rose in him to spring forward to her, nothing but the dread of shocking her too suddenly keeping him back, even in such a scene and with such spectators; Violet, taking her fan from a servant, crossed the pavement and entered the carriage, still unconscious that in the darkness of the night the life she held so dear was beating close to hers!

The carriage rolled down the Champs Elysées. Ere the door closed, Sabretasche went up to a servant, lounging against the portal to talk to a pretty *bouquetière* of his acquaintance.

"Où va t-on?" he asked, rapidly.

The man—Lord Molyneux's own man—started as he recognized Sabretasche, whom he had known so well two years before.

"Pardon, monsieur! Milor et miladi et mademoiselle, vont au bal masqué chez Madame de la Vieillecour. Puis-je oser dire à monsieur combien je suis bien aise de le voir arrivé en bonne santé de la Crimée?"

"Merci, Alceste!" answered Sabretasche, absently; his brain was still dizzy, his pulses were still beating loudly with the sight of that exquisite beauty that might never be his, that might soon be another's!

"Puis-je offrir à monsieur——?" began Alceste, hesi-

tatingly, noticing the deadly whiteness of his face. The question roused him to his old refined hatred of notice or publicity, and with a hasty negative he turned, summoned a fiacre, and drove back to the Hôtel de Londres. As he had entered it first he had met Léonce de la Vieillecour, the Duc's son by an early marriage, who, always accustomed to see the Colonel come to Paris for pleasure and beaux-yeaux, had laughingly bidden him go to see his handsome belle mère at her bal masqué that night; to which Sabretasche, impatient to rid himself of Léonce, had given a hasty negative. Now he was as eager to go thither, and dressing rapidly, drove to Vieillecour's rooms in the Chaussée d'Antin, and asked him to take him with him to the Duchess's ball. Léonce gladly assented, gave him a domino and a mask, (it was a fancy of the Duchess's to have it masqué; I fancy her belle position was not so all-sufficient for her, but that she was driven to *lionneism* as a divertissement from the stately grandeur that *would* pall sometimes,) and drove him off to Gwen's palatial house in the grim court-yard, among the dead glories of the Faubourg, lighted up for one of the most brilliant and amusing réunions of the season, for all the most celebrated and beautiful women in Paris were there; and the mask gave it much of the zest, the méchanceté, and the freedom of a bal de l'opéra—a bal de l'opéra where all the revelers had pure descents and stately escutcheons, though not, perhaps, much more stainless reputations than the fair maskers of mere "equivocal position," who were treading the boards and drinking the champagne of the opera festivities.

Not desirous of recognition; only waiting to watch that face so unutterably dear to him, Sabretasche persuaded Léonce to leave him, telling him he was tired, and would rather look on than join in the conversation, the intrigue, the waltz, the smooth whirl, and subdued murmur of the

society around him. Vieillecour, a man who always allowed others to please themselves, as he on every occasion made a point of pleasing himself, quitted him at his desire, and treading his own way amid the courtly crowd of glittering dresses and dark dominoes, left Sabretasche, the best-known man in Europe, the courted *lion* of both France and England, the *bel esprit* whose wit was quoted and fashion followed, whose bow was a brevet of rank to whoever received it, alone in that truest solitude, the solitude of a crowd. Had he made himself known, few there but would have made him welcome; but incognito, no one remembered him, nor looked twice at the little of his features his mask left uncovered, to recollect that they saw Vivian Sabretasche—for he had been two years out of society, and for any chance of being remembered in society, however before it may have courted us, and however we may have amused and delighted it, one might as well be lying dead among the sands of the Seine or the mud of the Thames, as have ceased to have shone in it or been of use to our *bons amis* for two long twelvemonths. *Hors de vue hors d'esprit* is the motto of the great world, which buries its greatest hero in Westminster Abbey and its greatest beauty in Père la Chaise, then fills up their places, and thinks no more of them in its ebb and its flow from the day when the dust of their tombs fell on their coffin-plates!

Sabretasche was alone in that brilliant crowd where he owned so many friends, but where heart, and eye, and thought sought for only one his love for whom had dragged him hither, to a scene so uncongenial to all his thoughts; but after well-nigh two years' absence from her, never looking on her face save in torturing memory, he would not have stayed twelve hours in voluntary absence; to breathe the same air with her, to gaze upon her loveliness, was better than that utter absence which so nearly and so

horribly resembles death that we may well shrink from it as from the absence of the grave.

He moved through the rooms, treading his way through the groups of men and women occupying themselves with the light love, the exciting intrigue, the laugh, the witticism, the badinage, which while away such hours for the beau-monde—those brilliant butterflies which toil so wearily on the treadmill of fashion; those fair women with such soft eyes and such scheming brains. He passed through them, and as yet he saw her not; though now and then he heard from men as they passed by him praises of her beauty, praises which turned his blood to fire, for how could he tell but that some of these might be his rivals, one of these be some day her husband? A man as tall as himself, in a violet domino powdered with violets in gold, passed him quickly; and Sabretasche, gentle though his nature was, could have fallen on him and slain him without shrive, for jealousy quickened his senses, and, despite his mask, he recognized Prince Carl of Vallenstein-Seidlitz, the man with whom in days gone by he had drank Johannisberg, and played écarté, and smoked Havanas under the lindentrees of his summer palace, little foreseeing that the day perhaps would come when Vallenstein would rob him of the one once promised him as his own wife.

He lost the Prince in the crowd; and still nowhere could he find Violet, whom his eyes ached with longing to gaze upon again. He caught a fragment of conversation as he passed between a faded beauty and a young fellow in a *régiment de famille*.

"So that English girl is really going to marry poor dear Carl! What a dexterity these English have in catching the best alliances, though they *do* forswear marriages de convenances, and cry them down with such horror."

The young man laughed. "Ah, madame, the English-

women are like their country, they boast of a great deal which they do not carry out. Yes, La Violette Anglaise is going to marry poor Carl—so her brother told me, at the least, and he has good cause to make that marriage, I fancy, for he has lost, pardieu! I should not dare to say how much, to his future beau frère, and Monsieur le Prince is no easy creditor when his treasury is as empty as it is just now.

Sick at heart, Sabretasche moved on—how dare they seek to sell his darling to pay her worthless brother's debts! Yet still he trusted her too well to believe that any persuasion, coercion, or allurements, would force her into a marriage-vow that would be a lie. He loved her, therefore he trusted her, through good report and evil report. At last he found himself in the ball-room, but among its waltzers he failed to find Violet; in her stead he saw a certain Countess de Chevreuil, who, many years before, had looked into his beautiful mournful eyes too long and dangerously to forget them now, and who, recognizing him with a quickening pulse, though she was a woman of the world, opened a conversation with him that she would fain have turned into the same channel as long ago. When at last she turned away from him, with a laugh that covered a sigh, to a man who would have given a good deal to win the softened tone to which the Colonel was deaf, Léonce de la Vieillecour dragged him perforce to see the Duchess, to speak to Madame of the Crimea and of Curly. She bade him welcome with that smile which no woman ever refused to give to Sabretasche.

Gwen Brandling and Madame de la Vieillecour must truly have been two different beings, that she could talk with scarce a tremor of that terrible death-scene in the hospital of St. Paul—talk of it flirting her fan, and glancing through her mask with those magnificent eyes, while

the dance-music rang out in her ears! Did she really think so little of her brother, of the fair child with his golden curls and his gleeful laugh, who had played with her under the shadow of the lime-trees in their old home, long, long years before, when the world and its prizes were no more to her than the polished chestnuts lying at her feet, and no prophetic shadow foretold to him his dying hour in the horrors of Sebastopol? Did she really think no more of him, as she waltzed in that brilliant circle with the arms of a royal Prince around her splendid form? Had the "belle position" she worshiped so utterly chilled all remnants of Gwen Brandling out of Madame de la Vieillecour? God knows! I will not judge her. Because there are no tears seen in our eyes, it does not follow we are dead to all grief.

The windows of the ball-room, that magnificent ball-room, equaling in size and splendor the famous Galerie de Glaces, opened at the far end on to a terrace overlooking the cool shadowy gardens behind the hotel, with their dark yews and cedars, formal alleys, and white ghost-like statues; and dropping the curtain of one of the windows behind him, Sabretasche stood a moment to calm his fevered thoughts. At the end of the terrace, having evidently quitted the ball-room as he had done by one of the twelve windows that opened on the terrace, stood a woman and a man. With all his trust in her, Sabretasche's heart beat thick with jealousy, doubt, and hate, as he saw in the clear starlight the white gleaming dress and the jeweled band upon her waving hair, which he needed not to tell him that the woman was Violet; and beside her, bending toward her, was the violet domino of Carl of Vollenstein, his mask in his hand, and on his impassive Teuton features an eagerness and a glow but very rarely awakened there.

Not for his life could Sabretasche have stirred a step



from where he stood; fascinated, basilisk-like, he gazed upon the woman he loved so madly, and the man whom the world said had robbed him of her, and would soon win from her the title by which but two years before he had hoped to have called her. He stood and gazed upon them, upon the sole thing that bound him to life, the one for whom he had suffered so much, whom he would have cherished so fondly; and upon him, the spoiler, the rival, who had stolen from him all he valued upon earth. They were speaking in French, and some of their words came to him where he stood.

"That is your last resolve?"

"Yes," answered Violet; and at the sound of that sweet and musical voice, whose harmony had been so long silent to him, Sabretasche's veins thrilled with that strange ecstasy of delight which borders so close on pain. "I am not ungrateful, monsieur, for the honor you would do me; but for me to accept it would be a crime in me and a treason to you. I know—I grieve to know—that others may have misled you, and not replied to you at the first as I bid them, and I sought this opportunity to tell you frankly, and once for all, that I can never be your wife."

"Because you love another!" said Vollenstein, fiercely.

Violet drew away from him with her haughtiest grace.

"If I do, monsieur, such knowledge should surely have prevented your seeking me as you have now done. I should have thought you too proud to wish for an unwilling bride."

"But I love you so tenderly, mademoiselle; I would win you at every risk, and if you give me your hand, I will do my best to make your heart mine too——"

Violet put out her hand with an impatient deprecatory gesture.

"It is impossible, monsieur! Do not urge me further.

Leave me, I beg of you. I shall never marry. I should have hoped my friends had made you understand this; but since they misled you, there was but one open and honorable course for me to pursue—to tell you at once, myself, that, much as I thank you for the honor you would do me, I can never be your wife, nor any other's. Your words only pain me; you are too true a gentleman to press me longer. Leave me, I entreat of you, sire."

He was too true a gentleman to press her further; he bowed low, and left her; he would not honor her with another word of regret, though it cut him hard, for *he*, Carl of Vallenstein, who might have mated with almost any royal house in Europe!—to be rejected by the daughter of a poor Irish peer; and as his violet domino floated past Sabretasche, Sabretasche heard him mutter, under his blonde moustaches,—

"Que le diable emporte, ce peste d'homme marié!"

He lifted the curtain of one of the windows, and went back into the brilliantly-lighted ball-room; and Sabretasche was at last alone with the woman he loved so utterly, who stood clinching her hands convulsively together, and looking up to the spring-night stars, the moon-beams shining on her face with its anguished eyes, and the costly pearls gleaming above her brow.

"Vivian—Vivian, my husband!—I will be true to you—I will. Truer than wife ever was!"

It was a stifled, heart-broken whisper that scarcely stirred the air, but it roused a tempest in the heart of the man who heard it. With an irrepressible yearning love he stretched out his arms, murmuring her name—that name that had been on his lips in so many dreams, broken by the din of hostile cannon. Violet turned, and, with a low, faint cry of joy unutterable, sprang forward, and fell upon his heart. That meeting was sacred; unseen by any eyes

save those of the pale calm stars, which watch so much of this world's deepest grief and sweetest rapture. For a while, in the joy of reunion, they forgot all save that they were together—forgot that they met only for fate once more to tear them asunder—forgot all, save that he held her in his arms with that heart beating against his which no man as yet had had power to win from him—save that he once more was with her in this life, come back to her from danger and suffering, out of the very shadow of the valley of death, from under the very stroke of the angel of destruction.

On such a meeting we will not dwell; there is little such joy on earth, and what there is, is sacred. As, after a dream of the night in which those we have lost live again, and the days long gone by bloom once more for us with all their sunshine and their fragrance, we awake in the gray dawn of the winter's morning with all the sorrow and the burden, the darkness and the weariness, of our actual life rushing back upon us, the more dreary from the glories of the past phantasma, so they awoke from their joy to the memory that they had met only to part again—that they had had an interval of rest, given them only like the accused in the torture-room, even that they might live to suffer the more.

They must part! If it be hard to part a living member from a quivering human body, is it not harder to part and sever from each other two human hearts such as God formed to beat as one, and which are only torn asunder at the cost of every quivering nerve and every clinging fiber? Heaven knows, few enough hearts in this world beat in unison for those that do, to need be parted! Yet—they must part; and as the memory of their inexorable fate rose up before him, Sabretasche shuddered at the sight of *that* exquisite loveliness condemned for his sake to a soli-

tary and unblessed life, desolate as a widow without even the title and the memories of a wife. Involuntarily he drew her closer to him, involuntarily he murmured,—

“Oh, my God! Violet, we cannot live thus!”

What comfort had she to give him? None. She could only weep passionate tears, clinging to him and vowing she would be true to him always—true to him, whatever chanced.

“True to me! God bless you! But, my darling, worse than anything else to me is it to see your young bright life so sacrificed,” murmured Sabretasche, with that deep and melancholy tenderness which had always tinged his love for Violet Molyneux, even in its happiest moment—a tenderness which would have made this man whom the world, with characteristic keen-sightedness, had called a heartless libertine, give up every selfish desire, if by so doing he could have secured her happiness, even though utterly irrespective of his own. “True to me! God bless you for your noble love! And I have nothing to give you in return but suffering and tears—I have nothing to reward you with but anguish and trial! If I could but suffer for both—if I could but bear your burden with mine! I made you love me! Oh, Heaven! if I could but suffer alone——”

“No, no,” murmured Violet, vaguely; “not alone, Vivian—not alone. What we suffer, let us suffer *together*. You would not have me cease to love you?”

“My God! no. Your love is all I have in life. And yet, if I were not selfish, I should bid you forget me, and try to rejoice if you obeyed. Violet, if ever you should”—and, despite all his effort, his voice was all but inaudible with the anguish and the tenderness he tried to hold down and rein in—“if you should think at any time it were possible to find happiness with another—if you could go joy-

fully to another's heart—if you fancy you could in other loves forget my fatal passion, which would have given you every earthly joy had fate allowed me, and has been only doomed to crowd your years with suffering—if you ever think another love could make you happy, *be* happy, my darling; I will never reproach you. Do not think of what *I* shall suffer; no complaint of mine shall ever trouble you. If you are happy—whom I love better than myself—I will try and thank God that he has not through me cursed the life dearer than my own, and in time, perhaps, I may learn to bless the one who has given you the joy I would have——”

He ceased; his voice was low and broken; he could not complete his generous speech; the great love in him overpowered every other feeling; he could not bid her wed another! Who among us would ask of any man to sign his own death-warrant? Who can wonder that Sabretasche shrank from consigning himself to a living death, to an existence hopeless as the grave, with throes of mortal agony that would never cease as long as there were blood in his veins and vitality in his heart? Violet looked up in his face, the moonlight gleaming in her eyes, so full of anguish, and on her lips, on which was the smile of a love without hope, yet faithful to the end—such a smile as a woman might give from the scaffold to one whom she would fain comfort to the last.

“Do you remember, Vivian, when you first told me you loved me, I said I was yours—yours for life and death—yours forever? That vow I did not make to break; it is as sacred to me as though it were my marriage oath to you. Love, happiness, home—and with another? You can know me little, my own dearest, to speak so to me; who, loving you, could care to look upon another, could *tolerate* another's vows, could think of peace where *you*

were not? Others have tried to urge me to infidelity. I never thought *you* would insult me too. Noble, generous, unselfish as your love is, I, your own Violet—I, who thought once to be your wife—I will be worthy of it, and I count sorrow from your hand far dearer than joy from another's!"

Sabretasche could not answer her; he tried to thank her, he tried to bless her for her words, but his voice failed him. To have such a heart laid at his feet, and to be compelled to reward it only with suffering and trial; to have such a love as this given him, and to be forced by fate to live as though he had it not!—to leave her as though she were nothing to him, when only grown dearer by absence, to part from her was to wrench away his very life. His burden grew greater than he could bear. He shivered at her touch, at the sight of that eloquent and tender loveliness which alternately chilled his veins to ice and fanned them into fire. Violet's nobility and devotion tempted him more cruelly than her beauty. Fair faces, well-nigh as fair as hers, he had often won in the long years before, while he was a man of the world, and she a young child playing by the blue waters of Killarney; but such a love as hers, never. They might have been so happy! if in his early youth he had not wedded—in his eager trust, and generosity, and honor—a woman he had thought an angel, and who had proved a fiend. They might have been so happy! Ah, me! what words in life so mournful as that "might have been," which banishes all hope, and speaks of the heaven which had been ours if our own folly had not barred us out. "*Might have been!*" There is no heavier curse on any human life.

His burden grew heavier than he could bear. With her words dawned the ideal of so fair a life! A life with thoughts, and tastes, and hopes in unison—a life such as

his poet's mind, weary of the hollowness, and satiated with the pleasures of the world, had sometimes pictured, but never hoped to find—a life of mingled poetry and passion, of every refinement alike of mind and sense—a life of love so precious, such as the fondest fancy, the wildest dream of his earliest days, his softest romance had never hoped to win. It dawned before his eyes, it rose up before his grasp with all its sweetest glories. The world—the world—what was that to them? he had but to stretch out his hand and say to the woman who loved him, "Come!" and both might go to a life beautiful as a summer's dream, where love alone would be their world—a world sufficient to them both, for here he dreaded no inconstancy from her, and here he feared no satiety for himself.

His burden grew heavier than he could bear. He grew more deathly pale; great tearless sobs heaved his chest; his head was drooped till his lips rested on her hair; he stood immovable, save for the fast thick throbs of his heart, and the convulsive strength with which he pressed her against his breast. The physical conflicts he had of late passed through were peace, rest, child's play, compared with this deadly struggle that waited for him the first hour of his return!

Suddenly he lifted his head.

"I have no strength for this! Let us go into the world. I must put some shield between us and this torture."

He spoke rapidly, almost harshly; it was the first time that his voice had ever lost its softness, his manner the tenderness natural to him at all times, and doubly gentle ever to her. She lifted her eyes to his with one heavy, hopeless sigh, and Sabretasche, as he heard it, shivered from head to foot. He dared no longer be with her alone,

and—he led her back into the crowded ball-room. There were many masks worn that night at that bal masqué of the Duchess de la Vieillecour's!

"I wish I were Violet Molyneux," thought a young girl, who, plain and unattractive, was brought to all such scenes to sit unnoticed and spiritless. God knows, brilliant belle though Violet was, there was little enough to be envied in her lot. They who did envy her, little guessed how her heart echoed the last words Sabretasche had murmured in her ear.

"Would to Heaven we could die together, rather than live apart thus!"

Violet left immediately; she told her father she felt unwell and wanted rest. It was true enough! Sabretasche had quitted the house at once; he could not be with her before the eyes of others, and, standing on the pavé, he watched her as he had watched her in the Champs Elysées, going to her carriage, with all her high-bred and delicate beauty—that beauty that must never be his.

He reproached himself for having given her the torture of the past hour. He knew she, like him, would buy their meeting at any price of suffering, but he felt the cost was too great for her to bear. She endured anguish enough in their mutual doom; and such conflicts as these would wear out her young life. Such tempests of the heart as they had passed through that night do the work of years upon those who endure them. Tender and gentle as he was ever over her, thinking of her trial before his own, ever willing to spare her before himself, Sabretasche—who felt as if he could never make reparation to her for having drawn down on her head the curse of his own fate, though he had done so all unconsciously and unwittingly, in ignorance of the chain that dragged upon him—at any cost to



himself would, had he been able, have spared her, were it but an iota of the weight of grief which love for him had brought on her young head. He loved Violet Molyneux with such love as is but very rarely seen among men or women!

He walked along under the silent April stars, heedless of where he turned his steps, unconscious to everything in that brilliant capital, where he had often shone, the gayest and most witty in its fashionable coteries, the most careless and most dazzling in its many revels; unconscious he, its once reckless and courted lion, of all but the weary burden which it was his greatest grief that he could not bear *alone*. He walked along under the calm April skies, the air around him sweet with the fragrance of the dawning spring, careless of the groups that jostled him on the trottoir, from the gay students, chanting their chansons à boire, to the piteous outcasts whose last home would be the Morgue; from the light-hearted, bright-eyed grisette of the Quartier Latin, to the wretched chiffonnier of the Faubourg d'Enfer, stopping to carry rags and filth away as wealth. He walked along, blind to the holy beauty of the midnight stars, deaf to the noisy laughter of the midnight revelers. He walked along, till a shrill voice struck on his ear, the voice of a woman, "*Limosina per la carità, signór!*"

The language of his childhood, of his youth, of his only cloudless days, of his poet's fancies, penned in its silvery rhythm under the fair skies of Italy, with all a boy's romance and all a boy's fond hope, while hope and romance were still in the world for him, always stirred a chord of tenderness and regret in his heart. For his fondest endearments Italian words rose to his lips, and in his hours of strongest passion Italian was the language in which he would first and most naturally have spoken. Despite the

chain that Italy had hung upon him, he loved her and he loved her language with one of the deep and mournful attachments with which we love what has cost us heavily, and which is yet dear to us. From his musing, that shrill voice, with its "Carità, carità, signór!" startled him with a sudden shock. Perhaps something in the tones stung him with a vague pang of remembrance, a pang as of an old wound suddenly struck in the dark by an unseen hand. At any rate, involuntarily, for the sake of the Italian words, he stretched out his hand with the alms she begged.

The face was haggard, faded, stamped with the violence of a fiendish temper, inflamed with the passion for drink; the eyes red, the lips thin, the brow contracted, the hair gray and spare—the face of a virago, the face of a drunkard. Still, with an electric thrill of memory, it took him back to another face, twenty years younger, with delicate coloring, smooth brow, coral lips, long shining hair, and dark voluptuous eyes—another, yet the same, marked and ruined even then with the stain of the same virago passions.

He gazed upon her, that dim and horrible memory struggling into birth by the light of the gas-lamp; her bloodshot eyes looked up at him; and *thus*, after twenty years, Sabretasche and his faithless wife met once again in life.

He gazed upon her as men in ancient days gazed on the horrible visage of the Medusa, fascinated with a spell that, while they loathed it, held them tight bound there, to look till their eyes grew dim and their hearts sick unto death on what they dreaded and abhorred; fascinated, he gazed upon her, the woman who had betrayed him; fascinated, she gazed on him, the husband she had wronged. They recognized each other; the tie that had once bound them, the wrong that had once parted them, would have taught them to know each other, though twice twenty years had parted

them; he who had wedded and loved her, she who had wedded and dishonored him.

There they stood, in the midnight streets of Paris, face to face, once more. They, husband and wife! They, those whom God had joined together! Oh! farce and folly and falsehood! There they stood together. The man, with his refined and delicate features, his noble bearing, his gentle and knightly heart, his generous and chivalric nature, his highly-cultured intellect, his fastidious and artistic tastes, his proud, poetic susceptibilities, so sensitive to dishonor, so incapable of a base thought or a mean act; and *she*—the beauty she had once owned distorted with the vile temper and ravings of a shrew; in face and form, mind and feeling, the stamp of an unprincipled life, a vulgar bias, a virago's passions, of a conscience dead, of a heart without honor, of a brain besotted with the drink to which she had latterly flown as consoler and companion; a creature from whom a passer-by would shrink with loathing of the evil gleaming in her eyes; the type of that lowest, most debased, most loathsome womanhood, ruined by the worst of passions, drink; from whom, if such reeled out before him from a gin palace, or passed him on the pavé, he shrank with the disgust of his fastidious taste, and the compassionate pity of his gentle and generous nature.

*Yet* these were husband and wife. Church and law bound them together, and would have thought it sin to part them!

She looked up in his face—up into those melancholy and lustrous eyes, which seemed to her the eyes of an avenging angel, for the last time that they had gazed upon her he had flung her from him in self-defense—a murderess in her mad and vengeful temper, in her dire hatred of him for *coming* between her and the love that wronged him—the

man so young, so fond—the husband who had borne with her so unwearyingly, trusted her so generously, who should have won, if ever man had a right to win, loyalty and tenderness in return.

With a stern severity foreign to his nature, Sabretasche gazed upon her. All his wrongs, all the memories of that betrayal of which he had no *proof* to give to the world, but which had stung and eaten into his very soul—all the torture which his tie to this woman had brought on his head and on hers who was dearer than his life—all the joys of which this wife, so false to him, had robbed him—all the happiness which she, traitress to him, denied him, with that title which law gave her, but which nature refused—all the horror, the bitterness, the misery of his bondage to this woman, and the separation from the one who so truly loved him—all rushed upon him, with a tide of fierce and cruel memories, at the sight of the wife to whom fate condemned him. His face grew yet paler and stern, with an iron bitterness rare with him. Wronged pride, outraged trust, violated honor, grief, loathing, scorn, pity, an unspoken accusation, which was more full of reproach and rebuke than any violent words, were written on his face as, sick unto death, he turned involuntarily from her—deeply as she had wronged him, she was sunk too low for him to upbraid. With a shudder he turned from her; but—with an inarticulate cry and a gurgle in her throat, she fell down on the flagstone of the street. Confused, and but half-conscious from the draught with which she had drugged her thoughts and satisfied the passion which had grown upon her, as the passion for drink grows ever on its victims, strongly imbued with the superstition of her country, while vague and stray remnants of the miracles, the credulities, and the legends of her religion still dwelt in her mind too deep for any crime, or any deadened

conscience, to uproot her belief in them,—the pale stern face of her husband, with those dark, melancholy, reproachful eyes that gazed upon her with a voiceless rebuke that touched even her into remorse for the lengthened wrong her life had done him, seemed, as he stood suddenly before her in the faint, cold light of the moon, as the face of an avenging angel beckoning her to the chastisement of her crimes; as the face of an accusing spirit come from the land of death to summon her to follow him. Debilitated and semi-conscious, her strength eaten and burnt away by the deadly potency of absinthe, her mind hazy and clouded, more impressionable at such times than at any other to the superstitions of her creed and country; struck with terror at what her weak mind fancied was a messenger of retribution from the heaven she alternately reviled, blasphemed, and dreaded; with a shrill cry of horror and appeal, she fell down at Sabretasche's feet a helpless, moveless mass, lying still, death-like, huddled together in the cold, clear moonlight, on the glistening pavement, before the man her life had wronged.

Sabretasche's impulse was to leave her there; to fly forever from the spectacle of the woman he had once loved so fondly, and who had once slept innocently on his heart, who was thus lost and thus degraded; to leave forever the sight of a wife who outraged every sense, every delicate taste, every noble feeling, but to whom the law still bound him, because from a drunkard no divorce is granted! That was his impulse; but pity, duty, humanity stayed it. Though she was his enemy, she was a woman; though she had wronged him, she was now in want; though she had forsaken, betrayed, and robbed him of more than twenty long years' peace and joy, she had *once* been his love. He had once vowed to cherish and protect her, and though, Heaven knows, she had long ago lost all right or power to

appeal to those vows, or that care, he would not leave her there, alone in the Paris streets at midnight, lying in the kennel like a dog. A crowd gathered round them in an instant—round the man with his patrician's grace and beauty, and the woman lying at his feet, squalid and repulsive—all the more loathsome, for the shadow of past loveliness that remained, showing all that nature would have left so fair, but for the vile human passions that had ruined and destroyed it. Among the crowd was a young medical student from the Quartier Latin, on his way from the Bouffes, who stooped down to look at her as she lay, and then raised his eyes to Sabretasche.

“Monsieur ! regardez comme elle saigne !”

A dark crimson stream was welling from her lips out on to the pavement, white and glistening in the moonlight. With a sickening shudder Sabretasche turned away. He had seen the horrors of the Great Redan; he had looked on suffering and bloodshed with that calmness and tranquillity of nerve which soldiers learn perforce; but a sudden faintness seized him at the sight of that life-stream which, perchance, bore with it the last throbs of an existence which was the curse of his own. The street faded from his view, the voices of men grew confused in his ear, the gray moonlight seemed to whirl round and round him in a dizzy haze, out of which glared and laughed in mocking horror the face of a fiend—the face of his wife. His brain lost all consciousness; life seemed slipping from his grasp; he saw nothing, he heard nothing, he was conscious of nothing, save that horrible loathsome face close to his, with its wild bloodshot eyes dragging him with her down, down, down—away from life—into a vague hell of horror.

The soft night wind fanning his brow awoke him from his swoon; the voices around him seemed to bring with them a glad rush of free, healthful, welcome life; the ter-

rible phantom of his brain faded away in the clear light of the moon, and in its stead came the memory of Violet's sweet, fair face. The truth rushed on him with the questions of the medical student as to his own health, the young fellow having noticed the sudden stagger with which he reeled back, and the deadly pallor of his face, and he answered the glance with which Sabretasche asked the question his lips refused to put into words.

"They have taken that poor woman, monsieur, to the Café Euphrosyne, to see what's the matter with her before she goes to the hospital. My friend Lafitolle is with her."

Sabretasche thanked him for his care, and asked him to show him the Café Euphrosyne. He longed to leave the place, to go where he could run no risk of hearing, seeing, coming again in contact with the terrible phantom of the night—the phantom that was no spirit-form moulded by the fancies of his brain and dissolved in the clear and sunny light of morning, but a dark and hopeless reality from which there was no awakening. But he knew by her prayer, "*Carità! carità!*" that she must be in want, poverty-stricken, and probably, now that he could make no more money from her claims on Sabretasche, deserted by her brother; and the heart of Sabretasche was too generous, too gentle, too full of knightly and chivalric feeling, to leave her, without aid, to suffer, perhaps to die, homeless and destitute, in the hospital of a foreign city.

The Café Euphrosyne was a rather low and not over-cleanly house in the by-street into which Sabretasche unconsciously had wandered, chiefly frequented by the small shopkeepers of the quartier; but the people of the house were good-hearted, good-natured, cheerful people—a man and his wife, with whom the world went very well in their own small part of it, and who, unlike the generality of people with whom the world goes well, were very ready

and willing to aid, if they could, any with whom it went ill. Their café was open, and lighted; Gringoire Virelois—the young épicier over the way—was giving a supper after the Cirque Olympique to his fiancée, Rose Dodu, and her friends, and in an inner room the good mistress of the house was venting pitiful exclamations and voluble compassion on the poor woman whom her bon ami, the water-carrier, had lifted on his broad Auvergnat shoulders and borne into her café, at the instance of M. Lafitolle, a medical student.

There, on a table, lay the once beautiful Tuscan, surrounded with a crowd—the many curious, the few compassionate—the life-blood still dropping slowly from between her thin ashy lips, her bloodshot eyes closed, her haggard cheeks more hollow still from their leaden hue, the hair that he remembered so golden and luxuriant now thin and spare, and streaked with gray, far more so than her years warranted. As Sabretasche drew near the door of the chamber a murmur ran among the people that the English milord knew something of her, and on the strength of it Lafitolle came forward to Sabretasche.

“Pardon, monsieur, but may I ask if you know anything of this poor woman, of her family, of where she comes from? If not, she shall go to the hospital.”

The flush of pain and of pride that passed over Sabretasche's face, and then passed away, leaving it pallid as any statuary, did not escape the young student's quick eyes.

“No,” he answered, quickly. “Do not send her to the hospital. Let her remain here; I will defray the expenses.”

He took out his purse as he spoke, and at the sight of the glittering gold within it, and the sum he tendered her out of it, Madame Riolette, though as little mercenary as a



woman can be who lives by the money she makes, thought what an admirable thing it is to fall in by fate with an English milord, and immediately acquiesced in his wish for her to receive the stranger, and listened with the humblest respect while he bade her do all that was necessary, and send for some surgeon, whom the young student recommended as the nearest and the cleverest.

Sabretasche waited there, leaning against the door of the café, the night wind blowing on his fevered forehead, a thousand conflicting thoughts and feelings at war within him, till the surgeon who had been brought thither came down the stairs and out of the door. As he passed him, Sabretasche arrested him.

"Monsieur, allow me to ask. Is she—will she——"

He paused; not to save his life could he have framed the question to ask if hers were in jeopardy; hers, dark with the wrong of twenty years' wrong to him; hers, so long the curse upon his own; hers, the sole bar between himself and Violet.

"Will she live?" guessed the surgeon. "No, not likely. She has poisoned herself with absinthe, poor devil! I suppose you found her on the pavement, monsieur? It is very generous to assist her so liberally. Shocking thing that absinthe—shocking! Bonsoir, monsieur."

The surgeon, without awaiting a reply to any of his questions, went off, impatient to return to the écarté he had left to attend his summons to the Café Euphrosyne, and Sabretasche still leaned against the door-post in the still, clear starlight, while the soft, fresh rush of the night wind, and the noisy revelry from Rose Dodu's betrothal supper, alike passed by him unheeded.

His heart throbbed, his pulses beat rapid time, his brain whirled with the tide of emotions that rushed through him. For twenty years he had not seen his wife; he had left her

that day when he had flung her from him, in self-defense, as he would have flung a tigress clinging to him with its cruel griffes, a young and beautiful woman, with the rounded form, the delicate outline, the luxuriant hair, the rich coloring of youth. As such he had always thought of her. In absence we seldom give account for the ravages of time; and this haggard, wild-eyed woman, with her whitening hair, her thin lips, her hollow cheeks, her remnant of by-gone loveliness, only just sufficient to render more distinct the marks and ruinous touch of years and bad passions, and that deadly love of stimulants which stamps itself so surely on its victims, seemed to him like some hideous caricature or phantom, rather than the real presence of his wife. For twenty years his eyes had not rested on her, and the change which time had wrought, and temper and drink hastened, shocked him, as a young child, laughing at his own gay, fair face in a mirror, would start, if in its stead he suddenly saw the worn and withered features he should wear in his old age. This sudden resurrection of the memories of his youth; this sudden meeting with the wife so long unseen; this abrupt transition from the delicate, fresh, and exquisite loveliness of Violet Molyneux, to the worn, haggard, repulsive face of the woman who barred him from her,—took a strange hold upon him, and struck him with a strange shock; such as I have felt coming out of the warm, bright, voluptuous sunshine of a summer's day into the silent, damp, midnight gloom of a cavern. And side by side with that face, seen in the glare of the gaslight, with that harsh voice and that shrill cry for alms, "*Carità! carità!*" and those wild, bloodshot eyes lifted to his, rose the memory of the one so young, so fair, with its beautiful open brow, and its earnest, impassioned eyes, and its soft lips white with pain, and the clinging clasp of those fond hands, and the quiver in that low and tender voice

speaking those noble words, "I count sorrow from your hand dearer than joy from any other." Side by side they rose before him, and with a wild thrill of such delirium as they might know who, on the scaffold, putting up their last prayer to God, and taking their last look of the golden sunlight and the laughing earth, see the pardon which beckons them to life among their fellow-men from the very border of the grave, there came rushing through his heart and brain the thought of *freedom*—the freedom that would come with Death!—to banish it he would have needed to be Deity, not man.

He leaned there against the door, his thoughts mingling in strange chaos death and life; at once going back to the buried past of his youth and on to the possible future of his manhood, when Rose Dodu and her party, brushing past him with their light French jests, going homeward after their merry supper, roused him back into the actual moment, and ere the house closed for the night he turned and sought Madame Riolette, to bid her have all that might be necessary for the comfort and the care of her charge, and wait for no solace that money could bring to soothe the dreary passage to the grave of the woman whose life had blasted his. Church people, I know, looked on Sabretasche as an *âme damnée* and a lost spirit—as a child of wrath, ungodly, worldly, given over to dissipation and skepticism and self-indulgence—yet, if I had wronged him, or were in need, I would rather have his reading of charity and forgiveness than that of "eminent Christians," though theirs is "doctrinal and by grace," and his the simple offspring of a noble heart, a generous nature, and a tolerant mind, which, knowing much evil in itself, forbore to avenge much evil in others.

Madame Riolette listened to his injunctions with the reverence with which gleaming Napoleons are sure to gain

for their owner all the world over, and promised to give the sufferer every care and comfort—a promise she would have kept without any bribe, for she was full of the ready and vivacious kindness of her country, and was one of the best-natured little women that ever breathed.

“Monsieur would not like to speak to the poor woman?” she asked, hesitatingly.

“No, no,” said Sabretasche, hastily, with that flush of pain which every thought of his wife brought with it.

“But, monsieur,” went on Madame Riolette, submissively, with her little head, with its white cap and its ponderous earrings, hung bashfully down, afraid of seeming rude to this English milord, in whom she, with French intuition, discerned that ring of “aristocrat,” which she, true in heart to the white lilies, revered and adored—“if monsieur could speak Italian it would be such a kindness to the poor woman. No one in the house could, and since she had become conscious, she kept murmuring Italian words, and seemed so wretched no one could understand them. As monsieur had been already so nobly benevolent to her, if monsieur would not mind adding so greatly to his goodness——”

And Madame Riolette paused, awed to silence by the pallor and the set sternness in Sabretasche’s face. She thought he was angry with her for her audacity, and began a trembling apology. Poor woman! his thoughts were far enough away from her. A struggle rose within him; he had an unconquerable loathing and shrinking from ever looking again upon the face of the woman who had wronged him; yet—a strange mournful sort of pity awoke in him as he heard of her muttering words in their mutual language in foreign ears upon her death-bed, and he thought of her young, lovely, as he had first seen her

among the pale-green olives of Montepulso, almost as young, almost as lovely as Violet Molyneux.

He stood still some moments, his face turned from the inquisitorial light of Madame Riolette's hand-lamp; then he lifted his head:

"Lead the way."

She led the way up a narrow staircase and along a little corridor, and opened for him a door through which Sabretasche had to bend his head to pass, and ushered him into a chamber—small, it is true, but with all the prettinesses and comforts Madame Riolette had been able to gather into it, and neither close nor hot, but full of the sweet evening air that had come in blowing far from the olive-groves of the sufferer's native Tuscany, across the purple Alps and the blue mountains of Auvergne, over the deep woods, and stretching meadows, and rushing rivers of the interior, till it came fresh and fragrant, laden with life and perfume, bearing healing on its wings to the heated, feverish, crowded streets of Paris.

Sabretasche took the lamp from the woman's hand and signed her to retire, a hint which Madame Riolette interpreted by seating herself by the little table in the window and taking out her knitting, pondering, acute Parisienne that she was, on what possible connection there could be between the poor, haggard, wretched-looking woman on her bed, and the graceful, aristocratic milord Anglais.

By the light of the lamp in his hand, Sabretasche stood and gazed upon his wife, as she lay unconscious of his gaze, with her eyes closed, and scarcely a pulsation to be seen that could mark life from death. He looked upon her face, with the stamp of vicious and virago passion marked on every line, on the bony, nervous hand that had been raised, in their last parting, against his life; the hand which bore on its finger the key that had locked the fetters

of marriage round and about him with such pitiless force, the badge of a life-long bondage, the seal that stamped the death-warrant of his liberty and peace, the wedding-ring that in the joyous glow and blind fond trust of youth he had placed there, with his heart beating high, with all a lover's tenderest thoughts, the sign as he then believed of life-long joy and union with a woman who loved him as well and as truly as he loved her. He thought of his bride as she had looked to him on his marriage morning in Tuscany, fair as woman could ever need to be, with the orange-flowers and myrtles gathered with the dews of dawn glittering upon them, wreathed among her rich and golden hair; he looked upon her now, with the work of twenty years stamped upon her face, twenty years of wrong, of evil, of debasing thought, of avaricious passions, who had lived on the money of the husband she had wronged, to spend it in the lowest of all vices, the love of drink. He knew nothing of how those twenty years had been passed, but he could divine nearly enough, seeing the wreck and ruin they had wrought. And he was tied to this woman! —if she rose from that bed of sickness, he was bound to her by law! His heart recoiled with horror and sickened at the thought; reason, and sense, and nature revolted, outraged and indignant at the hideous truth. He longed to call the world that condemned him to such bondage around him where he stood, and ask them how they dared to fetter him to such a wife, to such a tie; chaining him to more horrible companionship than those inflicted who chained the living body to the festering corpse, never to be unloosed till welcome death released the prisoner consigned to such horror unspeakable by his own kind, by his own fellow-men.

As he gazed upon her, the light of the lamp falling on her eyes, aroused her from the semi-conscious trance into

which she had fallen, weakened by the loss of blood, which, though not great, had taken away the little strength and power which she had, all vitality and health having been eaten gradually up by the poison she had loved and courted—poison slow, but ever sure.

Her eyes unclosed and fastened on him with a wild, vacant stare; then she covered her face with her hands, and cowered down among the bed-clothes in mortal terror, muttering trembling and disjointed words:

“Oh, Santa Maria! have mercy, have mercy! I have erred, I have sinned, I confess it! Send him away, send him away; he will kill me with his calm, sad eyes, they pierce into my soul. I was mad—I hated him—I knew not what I did. Oh, Mother of God, call him away! I am ready, I will come to the lowest hell if you will, so that I may not see him. His eyes, his eyes. Holy Jesus, call him away!”

Her voice rose in a faint, shrill shriek; the phantasma of her brain was torture to her, and in its unconsciousness the superstitious terrors of her childhood's faith rose clear and strong as when long years ago she had trembled, little more than an infant, to see the (to her) mysterious Host lifted above the crowd. She cowered down among the clothes, trembling and terror-stricken, before the gaze of the man she had betrayed, who, to her wandering brain, seemed like an avenging angel to carry her to an eternal abode among the damned.

“Poor soul, poor soul!” murmured Madame Riollette to her knitting-needles, “that's how she's been going on for the last hour. I wish the milord Anglais would let me send for the Père Lavoisier. If anybody can give rest to a weary sinner it is he.”

Sick at heart with the scene, and filled with a mournful pity for the wreck he saw before him, Sabretasche tried to

calm her with some Italian words of reassurance and compassion; but the sound of her native language seemed only to excite her more wildly still. She glared at him; her dark eyes, bloodshot and opened wide, recalling to him their last parting, when they had glittered upon him as now, but then with the fire of a tigress and the hatred of a murderess. She sprang up with a convulsive movement and signed him frantically from her.

"Go away, go away! I know you; you are Vivian, my husband; you are come from hell to fetch me. I have sinned against you, and I would sin again. I hate you—I *hate* you! Go to your English love! but you can never marry her—you can never marry her. I am your wife. All the world will tell you so, and I will not let you kill me. I will live—I will live, to curse you as I have——"

She sank back on her pillows, her little strength exhausted with the violence of her passions; her eyes still glaring, but half consciously, on him—quivering, panting, foaming at the mouth like a wild animal after a combat; there was little of humanity, nothing of womanhood, left in her—and—this woman was his *wife*!

She lay on the bed, her wild eyes fixed on him, breathing loud and quickly, defiant, though powerless, like a wounded tigress, stricken down in her strength, but with the fell ferocious instinct still alive within her. Then she began again to shrink, and tremble, and cower before her own thoughts; and hiding her face in her hands, began to weep, murmuring some Latin words of the Church prayers, and calling on the Virgin's aid.

"I have sinned—I have sinned; oh, Madre di Dio, save me! Fili Redemptor mundi Deus, misere nobis. What are the words—what are the words; will no one say them? I used to know them so well. I can remember nothing; perhaps I am dying—dying, unconfessed and unabsolved.



Where is Padre Cyrillo? he would give me absolution. Let me confess, let me confess, O Santa Maria, before I die!"

Now that the one thought of confession and absolution had come into her mind, she never let it go; moaning that one prayer to the Virgin, she lay less violent and less excited, but weeping piteously, and begging for a priest; a priest, poor soul! with that strange belief which Catholics and Protestants alike share, if not in the ability of another mortal to shrive their sins, in his power to help them rub out the dark scores of a long life at the last minute, when, frightened by the death that is drawing near, they exaggerate their sins; and yet catch at the feeblest straw to save them from them. Weary of the scene whose horrors he had no power to soften, heart-sick of the human degradation before him, Sabretasche turned to Madame Riollette:

"Is there no priest you could summon?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur," answered that good little Catholic, warmly. "There is the Père Lavoisier, the curé of Sainte Cécile, and so good a man! He will rise any hour, and go through any weather, to bring a ray of comfort to any soul; and he can speak her language, too, for he is half Italian."

"Send for him," said Sabretasche, briefly, "and show me to another room. You shall be well paid for all your trouble. I knew your patient in other days; I intend to remain here till the surgeon's next visit."

He spoke more briefly and hurriedly than was his wont; but Madame Riollette did not heed it. She would have been only too glad to have him always there, provided he paid as he had done that night, and ushered him with many apologies into the room which had lately witnessed Rose Dodu's fête des fiançailles. The scent of the air, reeking

with stale wine and the odors of the late supper, struck on Sabretasche's delicate senses, so used to refinement and luxury that no campaigning could dull or blunt them; and throwing open one of the small casements, he sat down by the open window, leaning out into the cool, silent street, over whose high-pointed roofs the gray dawn was growing lighter, and the morning stars larger. He felt a strange, irresistible fascination to stay there till he knew whether this life would revive to be again a curse to his, or whether the icy hand of death would unloose the fetters man refused to sever. Yet they were horrible hours—hours of fear and longing, of dread which seemed so hideously near akin to murder; of wild, delirious hope, which for his life he could not have chilled; horrible hours to him, in which he waited to know whether with another's death existence would bloom anew for him, and from another's grave the flowers of hope spring up in all their glories.

He had bade Madame Riollette, when she had brought him some *café au lait* and brandy—for he had taken nothing for many hours—to let him know when the surgeon had paid his next visit, and awaiting the medical man's opinion, he sat by the open window, while the soft April dawn grew clearer and brighter, and the sparrows began to twitter on the house-tops, and the hum of human life to awake in Paris. He sat there, for what seemed to him an eternity, his nerves strung to tension, till every slight sound in the street below him—the taking down of the shop shutters, the cry of the water-carriers, the bark of the dogs—jarred upon his brain, and every minute passed heavily away as though it were a cycle of time. His heart beat fast and thick as a knock came on the panels of the door, and it was with difficulty he could steady his voice to give the permission to enter. He expected to see the surgeon; instead, he saw the curé of

Sainte Cécile, a mild, silver-haired, gentle-voiced old man, of whom all Madame Riollette's praise was true.

"May I speak to monsieur?"

"Certainly, mon père," answered Sabretasche, to whom, from his long years' residence in Italy, the title came naturally.

"You know the sufferer to whom I was called?"

Sabretasche bent his head; evasion of the truth never at any moment occurred to him.

"You are her husband?"

The blood rushed over his face; he, the haughty gentleman, the refined patrician, shrank as from the insult of a blow from the abrupt question that told him that his connection with the woman who dishonored his name, who cursed his career, who blotted his escutcheon, and had now sunk so low that an honest day-laborer might have shrunk from acknowledging her as his wife, was no longer a secret, but known so widely that a stranger might unhesitatingly tax him with it.

"By whose authority do you put these questions to me?" he asked, with that careless hauteur which had made the boldest man among his acquaintance pause before he provoked Vivian Sabretasche.

"By no authority, monsieur," replied the priest, mildly, "except that which commands me to do what I think right without regard to its consequences to me. Under the seal of confession I have heard the sufferer's story; the one her life has sinned against is her husband; him she saw this night standing by her bedside; him she will never now rest without seeing, to ask his pardon. When Madame Riollette told me of your benevolence to the poor woman who had been found dying in the street, I thought you must be he whom she implores Heaven to bring to her that she may sue for his forgiveness before the grave closes over her——"

"Is she dying?" His voice was hoarse and inarticulate as he asked the brief question.

"Fast; when another night closes in—nay, most likely when noon is here, she will have ceased to live."

Sabretasche turned to the window and leaned his forehead on his arm; the blood rushed like lightning through his veins, his breathing was quick and loud, like a man who, having borne a weary burden through a long day of heat and toil, flings it suddenly aside, and his lips moved with a single word, too low to stir the air, but full of inexpressible tenderness and thanksgiving—the one word, "*Violet!*" Alone he would have bowed his face upon his hands and wept like a woman, but in the presence of another he turned with that calm and equable gravity which, until he had last loved, nothing had had power to disturb. The traces of deep and strong emotions were on his face, but he spoke as tranquilly as of old.

"You have guessed rightly; I am her husband by law, though I myself for twenty years have never held, nor would ever hold, myself as bound in any way by moral right to her. She has forfeited all claim or title to call me by such a name. Since you have heard her story—if she have told it you as truthfully as those of your creed profess to tell everything in their confession—you can judge that an interview between one who has caused, and another who has suffered from, twenty years of wrong, could be productive of peace to neither. I have cared for her, finding her suddenly ill in these streets; I have sent for medical aid; I have given Madame Riolette, I now give you, full power to do everything that wealth can do to soothe and soften her last moments; beyond that, I do not recognize her as my wife, and I refuse to see again a woman who, when I left her, would have sought my life, and who, even now, drove me away from her with curses."

He spoke calmly, in his low, sweet voice, but there was a set sternness on his face; compassion had made him act gently to his wife, but it had not banished the haughty and bitter wrath which wronged pride and outraged trust had ever awakened at her memory or her name.

"But, monsieur," interrupted the old curé, gently, "if your wrongs are great, death will soon expiate them; if her errors to you are many, she will be soon judged by a God more merciful, we must all for our own sakes hope, than Man is ever to his fellows. I have just administered the last offices to her. I should scarcely have done that had she been still hardened and impenitent. She repents; can any of us do more than that, monsieur? And have not all, even the very best, much of which we *must* repent if we have any conscience left? It is hardly fitting for us to sit in judgment on any other, when in ourselves we have much evil unexamined and unannealed, and if there were no outer checks, but constant opportunity and temptation, crime enough in the purest of us to make earth a hell. Your wife repents, monsieur. She has something to confess to you, without which she cannot die in peace, not even in such peace as she may yet win, poor soul! A word from you will calm her, will give her the only comfort she can ever have this side the grave. You have very much to pardon; but oh, monsieur, when you lie on your own death-bed you will thank God if you have conquered yourself and not been harsh to her on hers."

They were simple words. The curé of Sainte Cécile had never had much eloquence, and had been chosen for a crowded parish where kind words and good deeds were more wanted and better understood than rounded periods and glowing tropes. They were simple words, but they touched the heart of his auditor, awaking all that was gentle, noble, and tolerant in his nature. It was true.

What was he, that he should judge?—what his life, that he had title to condemn another? It was the creed that he had ever held in that fashionable world, where men and women sin themselves, and redeem their errors by raking up scandal and preaching moral sermons upon others, and seek to hide the holes in their own garments by hooting after another's rags; it had ever been his creed that toleration and not severity was the duty of humanity, and he had sneered with his most subtle wit at those who from the pulpit or the forum rebuked the sins they in themselves covered with their surplices or their robes. Should he turn apostate from his creed now, when it called him to act up to it? Should he dare to be harsh to this woman, simply because it happened to be against himself that her errors had been committed? He wavered a moment, then—his sense of clemency and justice conquered.

"You are right. I have no title to judge her. I will see her, if you think it best."

And the priest, as he looked up into his face, with its pale and delicate beauty, and its earnest and melancholy eyes, thought "what a noble heart this woman has wronged and thrown away."

## PART THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

## I.

## RELEASE.

ALONE, Sabretasche once again mounted the narrow staircase—alone, he entered the bed-chamber, and signed to Madame Riolté to leave him there—alone, by the gray faint light of the dawn, he drew near the death-bed of his wife, and stood silently beside her. The opiate the surgeon had given her in his second visit had soothed and calmed her; all the wildness and ferocity of her eyes had gone, but the hand of death lay heavily upon her. She looked up once at him as he stood there, then covered her face with her hands and wept, not loudly or passionately, but long and unrestrainedly, like a child after a great terror.

“I hear that you wished to see me,” said Sabretasche, in that low, sweet, melodious tongue in which, long ago, among the orange-trees and olive-groves of Tuscany, he had vowed his love-words to her.

She answered him not, but, still hiding her face in her hands, wept with low and piteous sobs; then she lifted her eyes to his with a shrinking shame, and suffering, and terror, that touched him to the core.

“I have wronged you—I have hated you—I have cursed you—I have stood between you and your happiness for twenty weary years,” she moaned. “You can never forgive me—never—never; it were too much to hope! Yet I wanted to see you once before I die; I wanted to tell you all. Even though your last words be a curse upon

me, I should have no right to complain. I have deserved it."

"You need not fear my curse," answered Sabretasche, slowly and with effort, as though speech were painful. "If I cannot say I forgive, I am not likely to insult you in your suffering with useless recrimination. We have been separated for twenty years; I am willing not to evoke the wrongs and dishonor of the past, but to part in such peace as memory will allow."

He spoke gently, but with an involuntary sternness and a deep melancholy, so deep that it was an unconscious reproach, which struck with a keener pang into the heart of the woman who had wronged him than violent words or fierce upbraiding. She clinched her hands convulsively:

"Do not speak so gently, for God's sake, or you will kill me! I would rather hear you curse, rebuke, reproach, upbraid me; anything rather than those low, soft tones. I have wronged you, hated you, lied to you; robbed you, betrayed you, dishonored you; to speak so gently to me is to heap coals of fire on my head. I repent—I repent, God knows; but, at the eleventh hour, what value is my remorse? For twenty years I have wronged you; what good is it for me to tell you I repent when I am dying, and can harm you no longer if I would?"

Sabretasche was silent; her voice, her gestures, her words struck open his wounds afresh. He felt afresh the cruel, bitter sting of his betrayal; he thought of Violet, of all he had suffered, of all he had made her suffer, and his hatred for the woman who had stood so long between them flamed up in all its strength. He might have pardoned his own wrongs, but the sufferings of the one beloved by him—never!

His wife glanced upward at his averted face, and shivered at the dark look it wore:



"Madre di Dio! you will never forgive me?"

He was silent. Again she repeated her passionate wailing prayer:

"Madre di Dio! you will never forgive me?"

He glanced at her with a shudder, and a weary sickening sigh from his heart's depths:

"*I cannot!*"

The words roused the devil in her, which the curé had thought those vain "last offices" had exorcised; the stern passion gleamed again in her eyes, and she sprang up like a dying panther: \*

"No! because you love your English mistress. Would to Heaven I could live and keep you from her!"

"Silence!" broke in Sabretasche, so sternly that she started and trembled as she heard him. "Never dare to pollute *her* name with your lips! I came at your request, but not to be reproached or questioned. Your own conscience must accuse you of the wrong you did me long years ago, when I both loved and trusted you. For more than twenty years you were content to live upon the gold of the husband you had betrayed. For more than twenty years you, who had won from me as fond, and true, and long-suffering affection as a man could give a woman, have been a clog upon my life, a stain upon my name, a festering wound in my side, a bar from all peace, all light-heartedness, all happiness; and yet because I could not *prove*, you would not even make the only reparation left in your power—acknowledgment of the wrong that you knew had parted us."

"But I acknowledge it *now*. I repent it *now*, Vivian. No one can do more than that!"

To the lips of the man of the world rose naturally the satire which was habitual. Yes! she confessed and repented now that life was ebbing from her grasp, revenge

no longer possible, and acknowledgment unneeded, as people who have played their last card out on earth turn frightened, with weakened nerve, to God, insulting Him and flattering their priests with "death-bed repentances!" and timorous recantations, which they would have laughed at in their day of better health and stronger brain! But he was too generous and too merciful to utter the sneer which rose involuntarily to his lips to a woman helpless and dying, who, however bitterly she had betrayed him, was now powerless to harm. He sighed again, heavily; the wretched state of the woman he had once loved struck him with keen pain; her suffering, her poverty, her degradation touched the man of refinement and luxury, from whom every jar and chill of the discomfort of a different world to his own had ever been sedulously excluded, and he could not look on the utter wreck of what he had last seen, perfect in youth and beauty, without deep pity, in which his own hate was quenched, his own wrong avenged. He answered her more gently, and very sadly:

"I did not come here to reproach you. Your conscience must know the wrong you did me, and my own life has not been pure enough to give me any title to fling a stone at you."

Well said! Libertine, skeptic, egotist, man of pleasure and of fashion, as society called Sabretasche, he could act up, even here with his most cruel enemy, to his doctrine of toleration. It is more than most do who preach louder and with more "orthodoxy!" But Sabretasche did not pretend to be a saint; he was simply a man of honor. She looked at him long and wonderingly: to the fierce, inconstant, and vindictive Tuscan, this justice simply for the sake of justice, this toleration, given to her *against* his impulse, merely because he considered it her due, was new and very strange.

"You humble me bitterly," she said, between her teeth. "But I have sinned; it is right punishment. I *did* wrong you. I wedded you because I was sick of being caged in Montepulito, and because I thought you, as you were, rich, generous, and of high birth. I never loved you; and when I was alone with you, your attentions teased and irritated me, and the solitude you seemed to think so like Paradise sickened and annoyed me, till I succeeded in making it a Hell. I cared nothing for anything you cared for; your love of refinement was a constant restraint upon me; your poetry of thought and feeling a constant annoyance to me. I grew to hate you, because you were too high, too delicate in thought, too much of a gentleman for me; your superiority jarred upon me and irritated me. I hated you for it. I hated you even for your affection, your gentleness, your generosity, your sweet temper, which were so many silent rebukes to me. I hated you still more when I loved Fulberto Lani."

As she spoke her lover's name, dark loathing and bitter contempt gathered over Sabretasche's face; he thought of Lani—coarse, illiterate, low-born, low-bred, as he remembered him—and felt, fresh as though dealt him but yesterday, the sting of his wife's infidelity with a rival so utterly beneath him.

"I hated you," went on the Tuscan, rapidly, with the fictitious excited force given her from the opiate; "and when, that morning, you surprised him with me, and taxed me with my love for him, I would not confess to it, for I knew the confession would set you free, and since you had once chained me to you I swore you should rue the fetters with which we had loaded each other. You left me. Well you might! a woman who had betrayed your love, and would have murdered you in her fury and her hatred.

Not long after, Lani left me too; he had only been fooling me; he was an idle, worthless, inconstant do-nothing, the lover of half the women in Naples, caring for and faithful to none. Gran' Dio! how I hated *him*! But no matter!—that is passed, and the rest you know. You know how, yearly, my brother threatened you with exposure of your marriage, and extorted from you the money on which we lived? That lasted for near twenty years. Pepe was extravagant; I lived in such gayety and such excitement as Italy could give me, and I sank lower and lower every day. I should have disgraced you, indeed, if our connection had been declared to your aristocratic English friends! I—a drunkard—*your* wife! Then we heard—for Pepe ever kept a careful watch over you—that you loved a young English girl; loved her more than you had done other women; loved her so that you would fain have married her.”

She was touching on dangerous chords if she wanted his forgiveness; his face grew dark, his soft sad eyes stern, and he turned involuntarily from her and walked a few paces toward the window.

“When we heard that you were in love with her—Pepe soon learnt it; it was the talk of London—and that you were going to the south of France, Pepe, unknown to you, followed, and laid in your way the Neapolitan journal with the death of my aunt Silvia; he knew it was so worded that you would believe I was dead, would deem yourself free, and would marry again where you loved. He guessed rightly; you engaged yourself to the English signorina; then Pepe persuaded me to go to England; then, as you know, thinking to get from you a heavy bribe for silence, which would keep him in comfort all his life, he went to you to offer, if you married your young English love, never to betray your connection with us, provided we

were paid enough. You refused. We could not understand your scruples. The signorina would never have known that her marriage was illegal, or that another was really your wife. You refused, and we were beggared. I had no money to go to law against you to make you provide for me, as Pepe had threatened. We could bribe you no longer, and you went to the war in the East. My brother left me to shift for myself as I might; he cared nothing for me when he could no longer make money by my name, and I was very poor—how poor *you* cannot think, reared as you have been in luxury and wealth. I have sunk lower and lower, till you have found me a beggar in the streets of Paris. I have done you cruel wrong. I have given you hate for love, betrayal for trust. I have robbed you of money for twenty years; I have stood between you and your happiness, and gloried in the curse I was to you. I have done you cruel wrong——”

She stopped, panting for breath, exhausted with the effort of speaking so long; and Sabretasche stood looking out of the window at the dawn, as it rose clearer and brighter in the fair morning skies. It had been, indeed, God knows, a cruel wrong—a wrong that had stretched over more than twenty years—a wrong that had stolen all peace and joy, not only from him, but from one far dearer than himself.

“Come here. Come nearer,” said his wife, in faint and hollow tones, as the temporary strength that her cordial had given her faded away.

His face was still white and sternly set as he turned unwillingly.

“Look at me!” she moaned, piteously, lifting to his the drawn, thin, sallow face, from which every trace of beauty had long departed, and as he looked he shuddered.

"Now can you curse me? Can you not feel that life has fully avenged you?"

He was silent; if life had avenged his wrongs on her, he felt that it had cursed him for no sin, chastised him for no error, since to this woman, at least, he had given affection, trust, and good faith, and had been rewarded by infidelity, ingratitude, and hate!

"Say something to me, Vivian," she moaned, in pitiful despair—"say something gentler to me. If you knew what it is to die with the curse of one we have injured on our heads. The past is so horrible, the future so dark! Oh, God! how hard it is to live only to die thus! Do not send me down into my grave with your curse upon me, to pursue me through eternity, to hunt me into hell!"

"Hush!" said Sabretasche, his low soft tones falling with a "peace be still!" on the storm of remorse and misery before him. "Hush! I do not curse you—God forbid—I tell you my own life is not pure enough for me to have any right to condemn you. If I cannot say truthfully that I forgive you—at least I will do my best to think as gently of you as I can, and to forget the past. I cannot promise more."

She caught his hands in hers; she wept, she thanked, she blessed him with all the excitable vehemence of her national character. Weakened by suffering, terrified by death, she seemed to cling to but one thought, one hope—the forgiveness of the man whose love she had wronged from the hour she had stood with him at the marriage altar; that fatal marriage altar, so often the funeral pyre for all man's hopes, and peace, and liberty; where, as by the priests of old, living human souls are offered up in cruel holocausts to a fanatic folly!

"I have but one thing more to tell you—I must hasten before my strength fails me," she began, raising herself

upon the pillows—"I want to speak to you, Vivian, of my child—your child——"

"The child of such a mother!—I can hear nothing upon that head."

"Santa Maria! why?"

His slight sarcastic smile curved his lips for a moment:

"Why? Dare you ask? How can I tell that she was mine? And even if you assert she is, what sort of woman must she be, reared and educated by you and Guiseppa da Castrone? You try my patience and my forbearance too far. I come here at your desire, I forgive you my own wrongs; but do more—be connected again with the past curse of my life, recognize in the slightest way any one of the brood that conspired to stain my name, to rob me of my peace, and to bribe me to a lie;—give my name or my countenance to one bred up under the tutelage of those who, shameless themselves, first taught me the sting of betrayal in my youth, and afterward tempted me in my manhood to dishonor—once for all, I tell you, woman, that *I will not!*"

He spoke with more impatient anger and stern passion than were often roused in his gentle and indolent nature. She had presumed too far on his forbearance! to try and farm on him a daughter of hers, probably Lani's child, or, if his own, one whose education and mode of life must have made her low, common, unprincipled, uncultured, such as he would blush for, such as he would loathe;—to be asked to give to such a one his name—the name that Violet Molyneux would take;—roused all that was haughtiest and darkest in his nature. She had gone too far, and to this he would neither listen nor accede. The very thought was hateful, abhorrent, loathsome!

"She *was* your child," the Tuscan repeated eagerly—"I swear it, and I should hardly perjure myself on my death-

bed—she was your child! God knows whether she is living now or not; I cannot have harmed her, for I have not seen her even since she was two years old. I put her out to nurse as soon as she was born, in a village near Naples, with a peasant-woman, who grew very fond of her. Six months after her birth, as you must remember, you and I parted, never to meet again till to-night in the streets of a foreign city!—we parted; and when the child was two years old her foster-mother brought her to me; she was going far away—I forget where—Calabria, I think, and she could keep her with her no longer. She was very lovely, poor little thing, but she reminded me of you.”

“Silence!” broke in Sabretasche, passionately. To have any link of the hated chain of the past cling about him still; to have any one of this loathsome Tuscan brood forced on him now, when death was nigh to relieve him from the shame that had festered into his soul so long, stung him beyond endurance. The child of such a mother!—what had he for her but hatred? “Silence! I will not hear her name. I will have none of her; if she press her claim on me I will refuse to acknowledge her. Whether or no she be daughter of mine, I disown her forever, she is dead to me forever. Great God! is the madness of my boyhood never to cease from pursuing me?”

The dying woman raised herself on her bed with eager, trustful haste to speak while yet her brain could serve her, while yet her lips could move:

“But you must hear me—you must! I cannot die in peace unless I tell you—she was your child!”

“My child or not—she was *yours*, and I disown her; my life shall not be shamed by her, my name shall not be polluted by her.”

“But hear me——”



"*I will not.* If she be mine, I will acknowledge no daughter of yours. You have dishonored me enough; my future at least shall be free from you."

"But hear her story—hear her story! You need never see her, never know her, but let me confess all to you—let me die in peace," wailed the wretched woman, piteously. "She was your child. Before her birth I never sinned to you; I would not lie now, *now*, on my death-bed, face to face with Satan and Hell. She was not like you, for her eyes were blue and her hair was golden, and yours are dark, but she had something of your look sometimes, something of your smile; her voice was a little like yours, too, and—she was your child! and I hated the very sight of her face. She did not like me—how should she! I was a stranger to her. She was unhappy at the loss of her nurse; she was afraid of me; I hated her, and I dare say I was cruel to her, poor little child! At that time an English gentleman, who was staying in Naples, saw her, and took a great fancy to her, as she did to him. His own granddaughter, the same age as herself, had lately died of typhus fever; she was his son's child, and the only relative of any kind he had left. Alma pleased him very much; he fancied he could trace a resemblance between her and his dead grandchild, and, after a time, he offered to adopt her, to give her his name, to make her heiress of his fortune, and to take her to England to bring her up entirely as if she were his own; that she was not so, no one would know, for his son's little girl, whose parents were both dead since her birth, had been born in Italy, and had never been taken to England. I accepted his offer; I was only too glad to be rid forever of her—she made me think so constantly of you, and I hated you more bitterly since I had wronged you. I let her go, poor little child! I was glad to be rid of her. I had some sort of

conscience left, and I could not bear to hear her voice even in the distance; I could not bear to see her smile, for she seemed to haunt me and reproach me for the wrong I had done her father. I let her go with the Englishman; and I have never seen her since. God knows, wherever she has been, she has been better than she would have been with me. I have never seen her; but on Christmas-eve, at Notre-Dame, a young girl tendered me charity, and I do not know, but as I looked in her face something struck me as like your child's—as like what she would be now she is a woman. I do not know—it was very vague—but her smile made me think of you, and she gave me something of that sad, gentle, pitying look with which you had left me twenty years before. I know not how it was—most likely it was all fancy—but it made me think of her and of you. If I had not sent her from me, I should not be alone in my misery, as I am now!”

She ceased, and tears rolled slowly down her haggard cheeks. All her life this woman had thrown away all the human love that had been offered her; without it her death-bed was very cheerless, with but two memories beside it—of the husband she had wronged and the child she had deserted.

“You never knew that English stranger, Vivian?” she asked, wistfully.

“What was his name?” asked Sabretasche, coldly. His own warmer and gentler nature revolted from this woman's cold, undying hatred of himself, and remorseless abandonment of her child.

“Tressillian—Tressillian. I remember it, because I found, only the other day, the slip of paper on which he wrote it for me.”

“Tressillian!” repeated Sabretasche, with an involuntary start—“Boughton Tressillian! And your daughter's name?”

"Alma."

"Alma Tressillian! Good God!"

And as things long forgotten recur to memory at a sudden touch akin to them, he remembered how, the day the Molyneux footman had overturned Alma's pictures in Pall Mall, we had noticed her resemblance to his mother's portrait hanging in his drawing-room—how he himself, when he saw her at St. Crucis, had observed the likeness, too, though, occupied with other thoughts, it had made no impression upon him—Alma Tressillian his own daughter! Little as he had noticed her at that time, absorbed in his love for Violet, now, swift as thought, there came to his mind all he had ever seen or heard of her; he remembered his two visits to St. Crucis; he remembered her extraordinary talent for art—the genius inherited from himself; her brilliant and facile conversation, which had drawn so many men round her at Lady Molyneux's ball; Curly's adoration of her, the sudden flush of passion which had passed over De Vigne's face when, lying on his sick-bed at Scutari, Granville had asked him to seek her out, and made him promise never to tell her of his marriage; and he remembered, too, what Carlton had told that night in the Crimea, that she was the mistress of Vane Castleton. Was it true? Despite her education, her frankness, and her apparent sweetness and delicacy, had she, indeed, hid unseen within her the leaven of her mother's nature? Had heartlessness and sensuality and treachery of character been the sole inheritance his wife had bequeathed her child? As all these memories and thoughts rushed rapidly and disconnectedly through his brain, she watched the swift changes of expression which, like shadows across the earth, swept over his face.

She grasped his arm eagerly:

"You have seen her—you know her, Vivian? What is

she like now? Is she a true, fond, pure-hearted woman, or is she like me? Is she cursed with any of my vile passions? If she be, seek her out. For the love of Heaven, find her and redeem her from her fate, if to do it you must tell her how low her mother has fallen; her mother, who loved her less than the very beasts of the field can love their offspring."

To have told this dying wretched woman of that baseless scandal with Vane Castleton, of which he knew nothing, and which all his knowledge of human character made him doubt, would have been brutality. He answered her gently and soothingly:

"I have seen her; or, at least, I have seen an Alma Tressillian, whom I have always heard was Mr. Tressillian's granddaughter; not much of her, it is true, but sufficient to make me think her all that you could wish her to be—a 'true, fond, pure-hearted woman'—all that a mother might most long for her daughter to be. Will you swear to me before God that she was my child?"

With something of her old national vehemence—that vehemence of expression which Alma had inherited from her—the Tuscan kissed the little ebony crucifix that Madame Riollette had placed before her:

"I swear it, Vivian, as I hope for pardon for my sins from that God whom my whole life has outraged!"

Sabretasche silently bowed his head. He knew that though she might have lied to him the moment before, she would not have dared to swear a falsehood to him by that symbol, which her Church had taught her to hold so sacred; and though at another hour he would have smiled at the superstition which made an oath sacred, where, what *he* held most binding, honor, would have been broken ruthlessly, something, despite all his wrongs, touched him painfully in these hopeless last hours of the woman whom

he once had loved, and who had been his bride in that warm, glad, brilliant, poetic youth—that youth which she had quenched and ruined with the bitterness of betrayal and bound with the curse of iron chains.

She asked one more question :

“Where did you see her, Vivian?”

“Twice at her own home, and once at a ball at the house of one of our English nobles.”

“And was she happy?”

“She seemed so.”

“Thank God! You will never tell her about me—never mention me to her—never let her know that the mother who neglected her fell so low and vile that she was a beggar in the streets—a thing whom she passed by with a dole of charity, with a pitying shudder? Never tell her. Promise me you will not. Why should she hear of me, only to know that I first hated and then disgraced her? Promise me, Vivian!”

“I promise!”

Little as she could understand him, she knew him too well to exact an oath from him.

She looked at him wistfully :

“Vivian, you are very noble. You shame me far more with your goodness than you could do with curses and reproaches.”

“No,” answered Sabretasche, gently. “Not so. I have no claim to virtue. My life has been far too full of errors and self-indulgence for me to have title left to give me right to condemn another. If you have sinned, so have I. No human beings are spotless enough to judge each other. As for curses, God forbid! They would be rancorous, indeed, to follow you to the grave.”

She gave a weary sigh. What she said was true; his forgiveness humbled and shamed her more than any up-

braidings. Then her eyes closed, and she lay quite still. All the extraneous strength and vigor given her by the cordial which the surgeon had administered in his last visit had died away. She lay quite still, her breathing short and weak, her brow contracted, her limbs exhausted and powerless, the hand of death heavy upon her, her lips apart, her cheeks gray and hollow, her brain confused, and weighed down with the cloudy thoughts, and memories, and fears that haunted her last hours.

She lay quite still, and Sabretasche stood beside her, thinking of that strange accident which had led him to the death-bed of the woman who had made all the misery of his life; of that cruel and inexorable tie which had bound him for so long to one so utterly repugnant to every better taste and every nobler feeling; of the deep, unsolved problem of human nature; that book written in such different language for every reader, that it is little marvel that every man thinks his own the universal tongue, and fails even to spell out his brother's translation of it. This woman had hated him; he had loathed her: they had been bound by a tie the world chose to call indissoluble; they had been parted by a fierce and ineffaceable wrong; after twenty years' severance, what could this man and woman, once connected by the closest tie, once parted by the hottest passions, know of each other? what could they read of each other's heart? what could they tell or understand of each other's temptations, sufferings, and errors? And yet Church and Law had bound them together, till Death, more powerful and more kindly than their fellow-men, should come to the rescue and release them!

That lifelong union of Marriage! Verily, to enter into it, it needs a great and an abiding love. With human nature such as it now is on earth, the angel that man or woman clasps so tight, and hopes will bless them, is very

like to curse them ere they can let go their hold; and the vow they imagined they could take for all eternity, they soon tremble to think chains them in the presence of a deadly Lamia whom they deemed an angelic Beatrice, even for so short a span as a frail mortal life.

So he stood watching beside his dying wife. A future, fond and radiant, beckoned to him in the soft sweet haze of coming years; yet, ere he turned to it, he paused a moment to look back to the past, to its sorrow, its sin, its trial, its conflict; to her, the bride of his trusting and generous youth, the foe of his manhood, whose sting had festered in his heart for these long twenty years. And with a new-born and unutterable happiness trembling in him, a gentle and saddened pity stole over him for the broken wreck of humanity that lay palpitating its last feeble life-throbs before his eyes; and every harsh thought, all hatred, resentment, and scorn faded away, quenched in deep and unspeakable pity. If his character had been hers, his impulses, opportunities, education, temptation, hers, how could he tell but what his sins had been like hers also? They were such, indeed, to him, whose natural bias was generosity, and dearest idol honor, as seemed darkest and most loathsome; but in that dying chamber Sabretasche bowed his head, and turned his eyes from them. Just and tolerant to the last, he held it not his office to condemn—now, above all, when Death came as his avenger.

So he stood and watched beside his dying wife, the woman who had wedded him only to emancipate herself from an irksome village home, who had hated, wronged, betrayed him, and who had been for twenty years a ruthless barrier between himself and peace—stood and watched her, while without the bright morning light dawned in the eastern skies, and the song of the birds made sweet music

beneath the eaves, and the soft western winds swept in through the casement into the chamber of the dying;—herald of the Life born for him and come to him out of Death. Suddenly her eyes unclosed with a vague, lifeless stare, and she awoke to semi-consciousness as the bells of Notre-Dame chimed the hour of seven—awoke startled, dreamy, delirious.

“Hark! there is the vesper-bell. What is it—a salutation to the Virgin? Ah! I remember we used to gather the lilies and the orange-flowers to dress up the high altar; that was in Italy—poor Italy. I wish I could go there once—just once before I die, to see the vineyards, and the wheat-fields, and the olive-groves again. There are such sweet warm winds, such bright glowing skies—ah! I was happy, I was innocent, I was sinless *there!* Why are those bells ringing? Are they for vespers? No; it is a salutation to the Virgin—I forgot. We must take lilies, plenty of lilies for the altar; but *I* must not touch them, I should soil them, the lilies are so pure, so spotless, and I am so sunk, so polluted; the lilies would wither if my hands touched them, and the priests would thrust me from the altar, and the Virgin would ask me for my child. I used to pray; I cannot now. Hark! those bells are ringing for the vespers, and I know the words but I cannot say them. ‘Pater noster qui es in cœlis.’ What are the words? I cannot say them. Help me, help me! Why will you not say them? Pray, pray; do you hear—pray!”

With piteous agony the cry rang out on the still air of the breaking day, as the dews gathered gray and thick upon her brow and the glazing mist came over her sight, and in the darkness of coming death she struggled for memory and prayer, as a child gropes in the gloom.

“Pray—pray! What are the words? Say them—in pity, in mercy! *He* has forgiven!—God will forgive! Pray—pray!”



And the voice of the man whom her life had wronged fell softly on her ear through the dull, dizzy mists of death, as he bent over her and uttered with soothing pity the words of her Church, the prayer of her childhood, that from his lips to her was the seal of an eternal and compassionate Pardon :

“Pater noster qui es in cœlis, sanctificetur nomen tuum ; adveniat regnum tuum ; fiat voluntas tua sicut in cœlo et in terra ; panem nostrum quotidianum, da nobis hodie ; et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris ; et ne nos inducas in tentationem sed libera nos à malo. Amen !”

Standing beside his dying wife, Sabretasche spoke the prayer to the One Creator—the prayer that should have no Creeds ; and as the old familiar words winged their way to her dying ear, bringing on their echoes soft chimes of days long past, and innocence long lost, the wild eyes grew tamer, the bent brow relaxed, the hardened lines of age and vice grew soft ; and before the last Amen had left his lips, with one faint, broken, mournful sigh, she died, and he, standing beside her, bowing his head in reverence before the great mystery of life and death, thanked God that his last words to her had been of mercy and of pardon ; that his last words had been to her the words of Arthur unto Guinevere—

All is passed ; the sin is sinned, and I,  
Lo ! I forgive thee, as Eternal God  
Forgives ; do thou for thine own soul the rest.

## II.

## IN THE FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

ON the meeting of those so long held apart by the laws of Man, I need not dwell. Nothing now stood between them. Words were too cold to paint their present—a happiness as full, and even deeper still than that of two years before, from the anguish passed, which intensified their joy as the golden and rose-hued beauty of the sunset looks even fairer and brighter still when behind it lies a dark storm-cloud, passing fast away, but showing what the tempest has been. Nothing now stood between them; and within a few days of the night that Sabretasche had arrived in Paris, Violet Molyneux became his wife.

- No empty conventionalities kept them apart; they cared nothing what the world wondered, nor how it talked; and they never thought of the malicious on dits and versions of their story, which were the one theme in Parisian salons. They went to the south of France for the whole of the coming year, to a château of the Duc de Vieillecour, near Pau. Both longed to be away from that gay effervescing world of which both were weary, and, under the purple skies, in the golden air, and amid the luxurious solitudes of the Midi, listening to the hushed and silvery murmur of the Garve, that chimed sweet cadence to their own joy—there, amid the voluptuous dreamy beauty of one of the fairest spots of earth, shut out from that fashionable world which had caressed, adored, and slandered him, far away from the fret and hum and buzz of outer life, Sabretasche surrendered himself to that love which gave him back his lost youth in all its glory and its poetry, and as night

slinks away before the fullness of the dawn, so the shadows of his past fell behind him for evermore.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sabretasche kept his promise. Alma never knew that it was to her own mother she had given the charity she begged after midnight mass at the doors of Notre-Dame that Christmas-eve. All that had passed in that last interview with his dead wife, he told to Violet. To find in Alma Tressillian, her favorite, her friend—the daughter of her own lover—that child whom, without knowing or hearing of, she had instinctively hated for her mother's sake—hated with the fond, jealous vehemence with which a woman who loves hates all or anything that has any tie to, or connection with, her lover, or shows that another has been as near to him as she—that child of whom she could never bear to think, and loathed with all the rest of that fatal Tuscan brood, who were his curse and his foes,—to find Alma, Sabretasche's daughter, was, at the first flush, intensely painful to her.

"That woman's child!" she repeated, turning her brilliant eyes, flashing and earnest, upon him. "I can never see her again! Do not ask me, Vivian. I have been fond of her, but now I should never look upon her face without recalling her mother—the traitorous wife who could betray *you!*"

That was her first impulse; but her sense of justice conquered this. If she had never known her before, nothing on earth, I am sure, would have induced her to see the daughter of her lover and of his dead wife; and Sabretasche noticed the involuntary shudder with which she first met Alma, after his relation of her connection to himself; but Violet was at heart both too generous and too just to allow the feeling influence; and in truth, for I do not wish to claim for her any virtue she does not possess, she was

too full of her own perfect happiness—a joy so sudden, so vivid, that she trembled at touching the radiant wings of the angel lest it should flee away and leave her desolate again—to bear a harsh thought to any soul on earth, or, indeed, to think at all of them in that paradise in which his love had now lapped her.

There was more than Alma knew, in the kiss with which Violet's lips lingered on her brow when she bade her farewell on her marriage-day—there was love for him who was Alma's father—there was gratitude for her own joy, too deep for hate or anger to mingle with it—and there was, for the first time, a relenting pity for the dead woman who had wronged and thrown away that heart on which her own now rested so securely. Bound by his promise to his wife, Sabretasche had been undecided whether or not to tell Alma of the relation there was between them. It was almost impossible to tell her without letting her learn, at least in some degree, what her mother's character and life had been; her first questions so naturally would be about her mother, her dead mother, of whom she would be so anxious to hear all. He had nothing to say but what would pain her; nothing but what would compel him to break his latest promise to his dead wife. The girl firmly believed herself Boughton Tressillian's grandchild, and she revered and idolized his memory; it seemed a useless cruelty to break the associations and the belief of twenty years to substitute in their stead a parentage that must give her pain.

To Jockey Jack, Sabretasche, when he told him of his wife's death, told him also of the tie that existed between himself and Alma. He felt no rapture at the discovery, nor any sudden and wonderful affection for her sprung up in the night like a mushroom, after the custom of men who find unknown daughters in romances, and are prepared to

be devoted to them, good or bad, interesting or uninteresting, for the simple fact of their being their children. On the contrary, to know that there was one living who bore in her the blood of the wife who had been his curse was keenly painful to him; and though in herself Alma pleased him, he shrank from any remembrance or acknowledgment of her tie to himself. But, for De Vigne's sake, he had been interested in her before; and for this, and for her affection for Violet, he strove to conquer the repugnance that he felt to her from her mother; and he wished to place her above the necessity of relying upon her talents, and to give her that position in the world to which her adoption by Boughton Tressillian, as well as her relationship to himself, entitled her. To do this was difficult, without telling her what he wished to avoid; but, at Violet's suggestion, he placed in Lord Molyneux's hands a sum which, relying on her ignorance of business and of law, could be given her as a remnant of the property of her *soi-disant* grandfather, suddenly repaid by those who had swindled him of it. This, Jockey Jack, who would have done far greater services for the Colonel, whom he cried up in exact proportion as his Viscountess cried him down, willingly did. Alma, a few days after Violet's marriage, which took place at the British Embassy, heard the Viscount's relation of her sudden inheritance—heard it, unsuspecting that any other story was concealed behind it; she was too ignorant of all legal matters to detect any flaw there might be in Molyneux's version of the tale; she knew her grandfather had lost an immense fortune in the British Beggars' Bank, and in other speculations; she was not surprised a small portion should be recovered unexpectedly; and, indeed, beyond thanking Lord Molyneux for having so kindly interested himself in her concerns, the subject occupied but few of *her thoughts*. As Lord Molyneux had predicted, when

the Viscountess heard that Violet's protégée was really of good birth, (she of course was left to believe her a veritable Tressillian,) and entirely independent of her, she began to be exceedingly amiable to her, and offered her to stay with her if she liked.

"I shall have no expense for her dress," reasoned my lady. "Men like her almost as much as Violet, even though she was only a companion; if I introduce her as my protégée, with a good name and some money, she will draw. She is wonderfully fascinating if she likes, for such a little thing, and I like plenty of men about my house. That detestable St. Jeu d'Esprit hinted the other night that I was jealous of Violet—to keep another attractive girl with me will silence all that ridiculous scandal. Besides an orphan—an artiste with that lovely chevelure dorée, and that dead grandfather—one can make quite a roman about her. She is very generous, too; she will pay me well for living where she will have such social advantages, and really, with one's expenses, money grows quite serious. Yes, I will certainly keep her with me, and marry her well; it is so amusing to have something of that to do, and, when one can get her to give her opinion about dress, her taste is really exquisite, really wonderful, considering the seclusion she has lived in, where it must have been impossible to study it as it ought to be studied!" With which concluding reflection on that grand object of her life, and of many other women's lives too, the Toilette, Lady Molyneux rose from the depths of her fauteuil to go to confession. She had lately been received, with much solemnity in the Catholics, and much bewailing of the Protestants, into the bosom of the Roman Church; but whether she would remain there was a query, as twelve months before she had been as low as she could possibly go, and had gone to Exeter Hall, and, indeed, over the

water to Surrey Chapel, with as much perseverance as she now drove to her beloved révérend père's very elegant little chapel of Ste. Marie Réparatrice, who was certainly a cultivated and well-bred gentleman—more than can be said of all his heretical brethren across the Channel.

That eloquent and handsome young orator, after the fatigues of the winter season, where the odor of his sanctity and the beauty of his long black eyes had procured him more worshipers, penitents, and devotees than he knew very well what to do with, especially as they were, one and all, fiercely jealous of each other, and quarreled for him desperately, (or rather, of course, not for *him*, but for the aid of such a saint toward heaven,) was going to stay at Fontainebleau with Madame de Vieillecour. The Duchess had taken refuge, too, in religious excitements, and chiefly in that particular and most amusing one, changing her confessors; Cupid lurks so conveniently behind the grille of a confessional, where the little méchant can be shrived as soon as his mischief is done. He was going to stay at Madame de Vieillecour's charming villa, and, among many others, the Duchess had invited Lady Molyneux thither for a few days before that lady's departure for London; and the Viscountess, telling her a long and very pretty roman about her protégée—which it was quite a pity for Alma's fame as a heroine of romance should not be true—asked permission to bring her also to that bijou among villas, poetically named the Diaman du Forêt.

Alma went, leaving word with the porter at the house in the Champs Elysées to tell any gentleman that inquired for her that she was gone to stay with Lady Molyneux at Madame de Vieillecour's, at her villa, the Diaman du Forêt, Fontainebleau. Little as she knew of Sabretasche, the moment that she saw him in the salons of the Molyneux's

hotel, and that he had recognized her kindly and courteously, she had asked him, with that fervent warmth which blended so strangely in her with her proud and refined delicacy, for De Vigne—for Sir Folko. Sabretasche saw by the flush upon her cheeks the emotions which flitted, as all her thoughts and feelings did, across her expressive features, that that dangerous friendship had deepened, as he had predicted, into something far warmer and more tender on both sides, and spoke fully and earnestly in De Vigne's praise, and told her of his gallantry, his daring, and the safety with which, despite his brilliant and reckless courage, he had come through it all; but he did not tell her of De Vigne's illness, only mentioning that he had been detained in Scutari, and would soon come home, through Paris.

"Is the curse of the marriage-tie to fall there, too?" thought Sabretasche. "How will it end for them both?"

Alma went to Fontainebleau, and while in the brilliant salons of the Diaman du Forêt, among some of the greatest belles and the most sparkling wits of Paris, La Petite Tressillian was admired and sought for that unconscious and nameless fascination which her talents and her ways gave her over men; all she thought of was to escape by herself amid the beauty of the forest, and under the shadow of its stately oaks, its sea-pines, and the beautiful silver larches that fill the valleys of the Rocher d'Avon, give herself to that deep and rapturous happiness which awoke for her at the mere thought of De Vigne's return, as the sun bursts out in all its glory after a long and dark tempestuous night. In proportion to her susceptibility and suffering in sorrow, was her sanguine and elastic faith in any gleam of happiness.

It was early morning when De Vigne arrived in Paris.

Alma's letter had sent new life and strength into his



veins; from that hour he recovered, only retarded by that impatient and fiery nature which, unaccustomed to opposition or delay, chafed at the bodily weakness—that weakness at any time so great a trial to the strong man—which for the first time controlled his will and kept him fettered and powerless. But with hope came fresh health and fresh vigor; he recovered sufficiently to be moved on board the yacht of a man we knew, who, having come cruising about the Bosphorus, offered to give us a run to Marseilles. The sea air completed the recovery her letter had begun; he lay on the deck smoking, and breathing in with the fresh Mediterranean wind his old health and strength, and by the time the *Sea-foam* ran into the Marseilles harbor he was himself again, and would have been a dangerous foe for Vane Castleton to meet. At first he had meant to go at once to St. Crucis, for where Alma was, or what had become of her, he could not tell, since that letter was written on her sick-bed at Montressor's house in Windsor. Then suddenly he remembered that the second letter, which he had sent back to her in such mad haste on seeing the address, which confirmed Carlton's story, had been dated from the Champs Elysées, and thither he resolved to go, on the chance of finding her there before he went on to England.

It was early morning when we reached Paris—a bright, clear, sweet spring morning in May. After the discomfort, the dirt, the myriad disagreeables of Constantinople; after the mud and rain and snow and cheerlessness of the Crimea,—how gay and pleasant looked those lively, sunny, bustling streets of Paris, where everybody seemed de bonne humeur, where primroses and violets, cassi and lemonade, were being cried; where Polichinelle was performing, and char-à-bancs starting with light-hearted students for a day in the Bois du Boulogne; and everywhere around us were

heard chattering, laughing, voluble and musical, that merry, silvery, pleasant language, as familiar to us as our own! What a contrast it was—a contrast very agreeable, let a man be ever so voué au tambour, after nearly two years such campaigning as we had tasted in the Crimea!

I drove at once to the English station. De Vigne wanted me no more, and they at home at Longholme were very impatient for my arrival; evergreens, triumphal arches, October brewed at my birth, county congratulations, and every possible fatted calf, awaiting me under the friendly shadow of my dear old Buckinghamshire beech woods. As I shook his hand as we parted, I saw he was impatient to be rid of me, and I saw on his face that eager, restless, passionate glow which told me he would never rest until he had found Alma Tressillian. How would it end, I wondered, as I rolled along in the chemin de fer to Calais? Did he ask himself so wise a question? I fancy not. Never all his life long had he ever asked how any step in his career would end. If he had ever done so, that coarse and vulgar beauty, with her rouge, and her tinting, and her embonpoint, and her cruel glittering eyes, now drinking her coffee with that dash of brandy in it she had copied from old Fanytyre, reading the dirtiest of Le Brun's stories, in her scarlet peignoir, before she attired herself regally, to be driven by little Anatole de Beauvoisier to a fête at Fontainebleau, would not have been called by Church and Law his Wife.

"Est ce que Mademoiselle Tressillian démure ici?" he asked at the entrance of the hotel which Lady Molyneux had just vacated.

"Non, monsieur. Elle est partit il y a huit jours, et Miladi aussi pour Fontainebleau. Elles sont allées visiter chez Madame la Duchesse de Vieillecour, à sa maison de plaisance."

"Quelle Miladi?"

"Miladi Molyneux, Madame la Vicomtesse."

"Où est la maison de plaisance?"

"A Fontainebleau; le Diaman du Forêt, monsieur. Tout le monde le sait."

With which assurance the porter awaited his departure, to return to his plate of onion soup inside his den; and De Vigne, signing a fiacre, bade them drive him to the Gare for Fontainebleau.

Minutes seemed to him hours; the train appeared to creep along its weary ironway; everything was dark and strange to him. How Alma could possibly have become acquainted with the Molyneux, still more reside with them, and go with the Viscountess to stay with Madame de la Vieillecour, appeared inexplicable. The devil of doubt again possessed him. The letter that vowed her love to him had been written nearly two years before. Since then she might have changed; she might have loved some other; she might even have pledged herself to another man! He tortured himself with every form of dread and doubt, as the train dragged on through the campagne printanière, till it stopped at Fontainebleau, the sun shining on the quiet French town, on the stately historic castles, on the deep majestic woods that hid in their bosom alike the loves of Henri Quatre, the beauty of Gabrielle d'Estrées, the death of the grand Condé, and the despair of the man who, abandoned alike by his courtiers whom he had ennobled, his marshals whom he had created, and his people whom he had rescued from the bloody fangs of The Terror, signed the act of his abdication in the magnificent halls of his favorite palace; where that child was baptized who has lived to restore his name and ascend his throne.

The train stopped at Fontainebleau. De Vigne knew it well enough. He had often been there for gay summer

fêtes, where the time had passed with sparkling wine and evanescent wit and light laughter and ephemeral love, before his marriage had darkened his life. The train stopped, and he went at once to the Hôtel de la Ville de Lyon, where, fifteen or sixteen years before, he remembered giving a brilliant dinner to Rose Luillhier, the then première danseuse of the Opéra, a gay, flippant little blonde, whom he had driven round in a four-in-hand by the Carrefours des Boux and Franchard to see the Roche qui Pleure, and had drunk champagne and sung Béranger songs, and enjoyed his Bacchanalia with all the joyous careless revelry of spirits undamped and unwearied.

Now, Rose Luillhier was a faded, ugly, broken-down woman, who, falling through a trap-door and ruining her beauty forever, had been glad to keep a mont de piété in a small way in a dingy, dark, loathsome hole in the Faubourg d'Enfer; and he—he dared not trust his present; he dared not look at his future!

He went to the Ville de Lyon, and inquired the way to Madame de la Vieillecour's maison de plaisance. It lay on the other side of the forest, to the southwest, they told him, and they had not a carriage left in the coach-house, nor a horse in the stable, there were so many pleasure parties to the forest or the palace in this month. He went to the Londres, to the Nord, to the Aigle Noir, to the Lion d'Or; all their conveyances were hired. It was a saint's day and a holiday in Paris, and numerous parties of every grade had come to spend the sweet spring-hours in the leafy shades and majestic futailles of Fontainebleau. He went to Nargein's and to Bernard's, in the Rue de France; but he could find no conveyance there. Impatient of delay, he asked how far it was to walk.

"Mais à peu près sept kilometres, monsieur," said the man of whom he inquired. "Voyez donc, monsieur!

Vous parterez par la Barrière de Paris, vous suivrez le chemin de chasse jusqu' à la Batte des Aires, et alors vous prendrez le sentier jusqu' au forêt du Gros Fouteau. Eh bien ! après cela vous prendrez le sentier de l'Amitié et dans un quart d'heure vous serez aux Gorges de la Solle après, monsieur.—”

Ve Vigne heard no more of the Frenchman's voluble and bewildering directions; a fierce oath broke from him under his breath as three carriages swept past him. In the first sat a young Parisian *lion*, and the woman who called herself his wife. From under her parasol of pink silk and lace, as she leaned forward, full-blown, high-colored, coarse, with a smile on her lips, and that vindictive triumph in her cruel eyes which he knew so well, he saw her face—that face unseen for eleven long years, since the day he had thrown her from him in the church at Vigne. He knew her in an instant, despite every alteration—and they were not few that time had made—and faint and sick he reeled against the wall of Nargein's dwelling.

Thinking of Alma, to see the Trefusis, the woman he so unutterably loathed, so fiercely hated ! Was it prophetic that that she-devil should forever stand between him and the better angel of his life ? She knew him, too, for she started visibly ; then she leant forward and bowed to him, with a cruel, mocking, fiendish smile.

“ Qui le diable est cet bel homme, Constance ? ” asked Anatole de Beauvoisier.

“ Mon mari, ” answered the Trefusis, with her coarse, harsh laugh.

Anatole had a great admiration for this handsome Englishwoman, yet he estimated her rightly enough to murmur to himself, “ Pauvre diable ! je le plains ! ”

A deadly sickness came over De Vigne, and a fierce ungovernable thirst for vengeance on her entered into him.

He hated her so unspeakably. Great Heaven! how could it be otherwise? that woman who stood an eternal bar between him and love, and peace, and honor!

He broke from Nargein's foreman with a hasty *doucœur* of a gold five-franc, which took the stead of the thanks he could not utter for his bewildering direction, and took the route by the *Barrière de Paris*, trusting to his memory to lead him right across the forest, for he had recollected the situation of the *Diaman du Forêt* as soon as they had told him at the *Ville de Lyon* that a few years ago it had belonged to the *Comte de Torallhier-Moreau*, a man whom *De Vigne* had known, and with whom he had had more than one night of *lansquenet* and merry French wit at that same *Diaman du Forêt*, then called the *Bosquet de Diane*. He followed the hunting-path that leads to the magnificent forest of the *Grand Foutean*. It was now after noon, and the soft golden sunlight turned to bronze the giant bolls of the old oaks and elms, and slept quietly on the soft green moss that carpeted the woodland. All around him was hushed in the heart of the great royal forest, the waters of the lakes were silent, the fountains fell with only a dreamy and silvery murmur, the sunshine trembled on the graceful silver boughs of the "*Dames du Forêt*," and the birds were singing with soft subdued joy in the dense foliage of those shadowy avenues and *futailles* that had used to echo with the bay of hounds, the ring of horses' hoofs, the mellow notes of hunting calls, when through their sunny glades the gay courtiers of *François de Valois*, *Henri de Navarre*, and *Louis de Bourbon* had ridden for the pleasure of the *Chasse* and the *Curée*. All was silent around him, save for the sweet musical murmur, nameless yet distinguishable, as of the coming summer breathing its life and spirit into the tender leaves, the waving grasses, and the waters of lake and fountain, long chilled and silenced by the iron

touch of the past winter. At another time the glory and beauty round him—from the giant grandeur of the oaks and beeches that had flung their shadows on the brilliant beauty of the mother of the Vendôme, and the fair sad brow of the Mistress of Bourbon and of Bragelonne, to the merry hum of the joyous gnats born yesterday to die to-morrow, dancing and whirling in the sunshine like the gay Human Life that from Philippe le Bel to Louis Napoléon have held their rendezvous, their fêtes, their love-trysts, and their hunting-parties in the royal forest, group after group supplanting those that pass away—would have awakened and aroused him. But now the very calm and loveliness about him irritated and chafed him, for his soul was dark with fiery passions and fierce thoughts, vain regrets and vehement desires, and his love for Alma Tresillian, his hate for the woman who bore his name and who had so foully cheated him, rioted within him like boiling oil and seething flame mingled together. He strode along through the hunting-path, edged on one side with brushwood and on the other with great forest trees, only thinking sufficiently of the way he went to take the paths that bore to the northwest, where he knew, on leaving the forest, he should find the maison de plaisance somewhere between Fontainebleau and Chailly. He struck into the Fulaci du Gros Fouteau, knowing that, by keeping to his left, he should come upon the road to Chailly, brushing his way through the tangled forest-branches that had stood the sunshine and the storm of lengthened centuries. As he swung along, his eyes upon the ground, blind to all the beauty of the woodlands, he glanced upward to put aside the boughs; and—with an inarticulate cry he sprang forward.

Half sitting, half lying on the fallen trunk of a beech that had been struck by lightning a few days before, her

hat on the grass beside her, the sunshine falling down through the thick branches on to her brilliant golden hair, and her delicate, intelligent, expressive features, expressive even in complete repose, and while her eyes, fixed on the turf at her feet, were veiled beneath her silky curling lashes, he saw once more the face that he had last seen lifted to his in the summer moonlight at St. Crucis nearly two years passed and gone!

At the sound of the voice which, in the hum and murmur of society and the solitude of the long night-watches, she had thirsted, yearned, prayed to hear again, Alma looked up—in another moment she was in his arms, clinging to him as if no earthly power should ever part them; weeping passionate tears of joy, then laughing in her agony of gladness; her soft warm lips pressed to his, her hands clasped round his neck as if she would never let him go from her again, while she had strength, or life, or power to keep him; while dizzy with the delirium of passion and of rapture that surged up in tenfold strength after those weary years of absence and of torture, he lifted her from the ground and held her in his passionate embrace, crushing her against his heart, their long and mute caresses more eloquent than words. Then Alma raised her face to his, flushing with a bright crimson glow, and fading to a marble whiteness, her eyes almost black with that eager joy which shone in them through their tears, her arms clinging closer and closer round him, her voice trembling with the love which her vehement Southern nature had poured out upon De Vigne.

"You do not doubt me now? You know how I love you—only you? You will never leave me again?"

"Never, my God!—never!" And as he poured out upon her in his breathless caresses the passion which words



were too cold and tame to utter, he forgot—for the time, utterly, entirely forgot—that cold, cruel, jeering, coarse, vindictive face that had passed him but an hour before, and—forgot, also, the tie that bound him.

It was long ere they could summon calmness enough to talk of all that both had suffered in those long and weary months. Their joy was too deep for any effort at tranquillity; all she cared for was to look up into his eyes, to murmur his name every now and then as if to assure her of his presence, to lavish upon him with tears of joy that caressing and vehement fondness natural to her in all the abandon and fervor of her Italian blood; all he cared for was to have such love poured out on him; to drink, after lengthened and unbearable drought, of the fresh sweet waters of human affection; to lavish on the only thing that he loved, and that loved him, all the pent-up well-springs of his heart; to hold her there close—close, so that none could come to rob him of her a second time—the one lost to him for so long!

Do you wonder at him? Go and travel in Sahara, across that great, dreary, blinding, shadowless, hopeless plain of glaring yellow sand, where you see no living thing save the vulture whirling aloft awaiting some dead camel ere it can make its loathsome feast; travel with the thirst of the desert upon you, your throat parching, your eyes starting, your whole frame quivering with longing for the simple drop of water which your fellows fling away unvalued. When you come to the clear, cool springs flowing with musical ripple under the friendly shadows of the banyans and the palms, would you have the courage to turn away and leave the draught untasted, and go back alone into the desert to die?

It was long before they could speak of what they had both suffered, and when she told him all, more fully than

she could in writing, of Vane Castleton's treachery and brutality, the dark fierce blood surged over his brow, and a gloom came upon his face which boded her foe no good.

"By Heaven! if a man's hand can revenge such things, he shall pay bitterly for his coward plot," he muttered to himself.

"What are you saying?" asked Alma.

He kissed the lips which he would not answer:

"Do not ask, my darling. To think that dastard villain dared to lay his hand upon you wakes a devil in me. My God! to hear of such a brutal plot against what he loves best and holds most tenderly, would wake a milder man than I to fury. My darling, my precious one! to think that brute should have ventured to lure you in his hateful toils, should have polluted your ears with his loathsome vows, should have dared to touch your little hand with his——"

He stopped; his fierce anger overmastered him. To think Vane Castleton had dared to insult her; to think his dastard love, which was poison to any woman, should have been breathed on her, on whom he would have had the summer wind never play too rudely; to think that his hated kiss should have ventured to touch those soft, warm lips, pure as ungathered rose-leaves, that were consecrated wholly to himself! De Vigne vowed bitterly to himself to revenge it as none of Vane Castleton's deeds had been revenged before.

"Never mind it," whispered Alma, caressingly. *She* had no fear of De Vigne's darkest passions—indeed, they endeared him to her. "Do not think of it. He is a bad man; but, since he could not part us, we may surely forgive him, or, at least, forget him? Now I have *you* back, I could pardon anything. When life is so beautiful and God's mercy so great, one can rarely harbor hard thoughts

of any one. It is when we *suffer* that we could revenge."

He pressed her closer to his heart:

"You are better than I, my little one!"

"No!" said Alma, passionately, "I am better than none; still less am I better than you, noble, generous, knightly as you are in thought and in deed, in heart and in soul. I loved and revered you before more than any woman ever did man, but since your courage, your suffering, your daring, your heroism, I love you more dearly, I reverence you more highly, if indeed it be possible, my love, my lord, my husband!"

As the last word fell on his ear, De Vigne started as at a mortal wound from the steel! That title from her lips struck him keenly, bitterly as any sword-thrust!—to have to tell her he had deceived her, to have to give a death-blow to that unsuspecting confidence, that deep, true love, that radiant, shadowless happiness with which she clung to him, as if, now they were together, life had brought her a heaven upon earth which no shadow would have power to cloud; to have to quench the light in her sunny eyes, and tell her that another called him by that name!

The hand that held both hers trembled; the warm, passionate glow faded off his face; his heart turned sick: how could he tell her that for three long years the secret of his life had been withheld from her—that, married, he had gone to her as a free man—that, bound himself, he had won her love in all its depth and fervency—that, trusted implicitly, worshiped entirely, he had gone on from day to day, from week to week, with that fatal tie unacknowledged, that dark and cruel secret unconfessed? And she looked up in his face, too, as she clung to him, with such a world of love and worship, such a glory of passionate and eager joy in her brilliant, loving eyes, that seemed never to weary

of gazing into his! And he had to say to her: "Your trust is unmerited. I have deceived you!"

Never until that hour had De Vigne realized the whole horror, weight, and burden of the fetters the Church had lent its hand to forge eleven long years before. Unconsciously and innocently the woman, who would have periled her life to save him a single pang, struck a yet sharper blow to the just-opened wound! Noticing the gloom that gathered in his eyes, Alma, to dispel, laughed, with her old gay and childlike insouciance, which she had never felt before since the evening they had parted in the little studio at St. Crucis.

"Yes, Sir Folko, in one thing I *am* better than you. I have more faith! You could doubt and disbelieve your own Alma; you could think that, after loving *you*, she could desert, and forget, and betray you; you could credit cruel reports that made her the most false, contemptible, loathsome of her sex—but I never dreamt of doubting *you*, though I might have done so. Sir Folko, I had stronger evidence still! But I trusted you, my lord, my love! I would have disbelieved angels had they come to witness against you; in your absence none should dare to slander you to me; and if they had brought proofs of every force under the sun, I would have thrown them in their teeth as falsehoods and forgeries, if they had stained *your* honor!"

She spoke now with that vehement eloquence which always came to her when roused to any deep emotion or warm excitement; her eyes flashed, and her face glowed with love, and pride, and faith. Yet—every one of those noble and tender words quivered like a knife in his heart! He bent his head till his brow rested on her hair; and the man, whose iron nerves had not quailed, nor pulse beat one shade quicker, before the deadly flame blazing from

the thirty guns at Balaklava, shuddered as he thought, "How can I tell her I have deceived her!" Unconscious of the effect her words had on him, or the sting which lay for him in her noble and innocent trust, Alma went on—a glow of scorn, contempt, and haughty impatience at the memory passing over her face, with one of those rapid mutations of expression which gave her face one of its greatest charms:

"Oh, Granville, how I hated that woman that Lord Vane sent to pretend to be your wife! He was very unwise not to choose some one a little more refined, and like what your wife might have been! She was such a bold, coarse, cruel-eyed woman, with not the trace of a lady in her, for all her showy, gorgeous dress. Who do you think she could have been? Some actress, I should fancy—should not you?—whom he paid to take the rôle, but she did it very badly." And Alma laughed—a low, glad, silvery laugh—at the recollection. "She was not much like a woman who had loved and lost you; there was not a shadow of regret, or tenderness, or softness in her when she spoke of you, and to think she should dare to take *your* name—should dare to presume to claim *you*! And she actually had the audacity to show me your name on that piece of paper that she called a marriage-certificate. I don't know whether it was like one, for I never saw one; but they had written your name. Oh! Granville, how I hated her—the coarse, audacious, insulting woman, who dared to assume your name! I could have struck her—I could have done anything to her. She roused my 'devil,' as you call it. If she had stayed another moment I should have rung for nurse to turn her out of the room. It sounds absurd to say so, for she was such a tall, dashing, would-be grandiose woman; but I do think she was afraid of me—she did not like me to look straight at her and detect her

falsehoods. But I never believed her, my own dearest—never for a moment. Thank God, my trust in you never wavered for an instant, and she never tempted me even in one passing thought to disgrace you with the doubt that that coarse, bad woman had ever been your wife. Thank God, I was too worthy of your love to insult you, even with a thought of credence in her ill-laid plot——!”

“Stop, stop—for the love of Heaven—or you will kill me!” burst involuntarily from De Vigne. He felt as if his heart would break, his brain give way, if she said another word to add to the coals of fire she was heaping so innocently upon his head! Every word she uttered in her unconscious gladness, in her noble faith, seemed to brand his soul with shame and suffering, which years would never have power to efface;—to have to tell her her trust had been misplaced—to have to confess to her that the woman whom she truly thought would disgrace him *was* his wife—to have to listen to those fond, proud, trusting words, and answer them with what would quench and darken all her glad and generous faith, and, for aught he knew, turn from him forever that love to which he clung with all the strength and passion of his nature! Proud, candid, worshipping truth as she did, would she love him still when she knew that for three long years that dark secret had been kept unspoken and unconfessed between them? Idolizing and reverencing him as she did, thinking him matchless for honor, nobility, and stainless aristocracy of blood, and name, and character, could he hope to keep that idolatry, which was so dear to him, when she heard that he had allied himself to one whom even her slight knowledge of her had seen to be utterly unworthy and beneath him—when she heard that he, whose idol, like her own, had been honor, had kept hidden and shrouded from her the dark, inexorable bonds with which the marriage-tie had chained and weighed him down?

Startled and terrified, she tried to look into his face; but his head was bent, so that she could see nothing save the blue veins swelling on his forehead.

"Granville, dearest, what have I said—what have I done? Speak to me, answer me, for Heaven's sake!"

He did not answer her. What could he say? The veins on his temples grew like cords, and all the glow of eagerness and passion, so bright on his face a few moments ago, faded away into that dead, gray pallor which had overspread his face upon his marriage-day. A vague and horrible terror came over the woman who loved him. She threw her arms round his neck; she pressed her warm lips to his forehead, pale and lined with the bitter thoughts in his brain; she only thought of him then, never of herself.

"Granville, tell me, what have I said—I, who would give my life to spare you the slightest pain?"

He seized her in his arms; he pressed her against his heart, throbbing to suffocation:

"My worshiped darling! do not speak gently to me! That woman is my wife!"

It was told at last—the stain on his name, the curse on his life, the secret kept so long! Her face was raised to his; its fair, girlish bloom changed to his own bloodless and lifeless pallor, her eyes wide open, with a vague, amazed horror in them. She scarcely understood what he had said; she could not realize it in the least degree.

"Your wife!" she repeated, mechanically, after him. "Your wife! Granville, darling, you are jesting, you are trying me; it is not true!"

He held her closer to him, and rested his lips on her golden hair; he could not bear to see those fond, frank eyes gaze into his with that pitiful terror, that haunting, pleading earnestness which would not believe even his own words against him!

"God forgive me, it is true!"

With a cry that rang through the old beech woods and oak coppices of the forest, Alma bowed down before the blow dealt to her by the hand that loved her best. She did not weep, like most women, but her heart paused almost long enough for life to cease. She gasped for breath; the blood rushed to her brain, crimsoning all her face, then left it white and colorless as death. She pressed her hand upon her heart, struggling for breath, looking up in his face all the while, as a spaniel that its master had slain would look up in his, the love outliving and pardoning the death-blow.

For the moment he thought he had killed her. Like a madman, he called upon her name; he covered her blanched lips with caresses passionate enough to call back all their life and warmth; he vowed to Heaven that he loved her dearer than any husband ever loved his wife; that he hated the woman who bore his name—wretch, fiend, she-devil that she was! He called her his own, his love, his darling; he swore never to leave her while his life lasted; he besought her, if ever she had cared for him, to look at him and tell him she forgave him!

She did not shrink from him a moment, but clung the closer to him, breathless, trembling, quivering with pain, like a delicate animal after a cruel blow, her heart throbbing wildly against his. She looked up in his face with that passionate love which would never change to him nor desert him:

"Forgive you! Yes, what would *I* not forgive you! But——"

Her voice broke down in convulsive sobs, and she lay in his arms weeping unrestrainedly, with all the force and vehemence of her nature; while he bowed his head over her, and his own bitter, scorching tears fell on her bright



golden hair. He let her weep on and on, her strongest and deepest feelings pouring themselves out in that resistless tide of emotion which with her never relieved, but rather increased, her suffering. He could not speak to her; he could only clasp her tighter and tighter to him, murmuring broken, earnest words of his agonized remorse.

Once she looked up at him with those radiant eyes, from which he had quenched the light and glory:

"You do not love her, Granville? You cannot!"

There was her old passionate vehemence in the question—as passionately he answered her:

"Love her! Great Heaven! no word could tell you how I *hate* her; how I have hated her ever since that cursed day when she first took my name, to stain it and dishonor it. My precious one! my hate for her is as great as my love for you; greater it cannot be!"

"And yet—she is your wife! Oh God have pity on us!"

Her lips turned white, as if in bodily pain, her eyes closed, and she shivered as with great cold.

He pressed her against his heart; great drops of suffering stood upon his brow. It was an agony greater than death to him to see the misery on her young, radiant face, and to know that he had brought it there—he who would have sheltered her from every chill breath, guarded her from every touch of the sorrow common to all human kind.

"Would to Heaven I had died before my selfish passions brought the shadow of my curse on your young head!" he muttered, as he bent over her. "Alma, you forgive me—but you cannot love me after I have deceived you. You cannot love me, false as I have been to my own *idol* of truth and honor. God knows I meant no deliber-

ate wrong. I went on and on from day to day, till what had been at first merely distasteful to tell, became at last impossible! Answer me; can your affection survive the bitter wrong I have done it? Can you love me though I fall from your ideal, though I have sunk so low?"

Breathless he waited for her answer—breathless and trembling, his face white as hers, his firm and haughty lips quivering with suspense, his head bent and humbled, as he made one of the hardest, yet one of the noblest confessions a proud man can ever make—"I was wrong!"

She lifted her face to his, so true to the generous and faithful and unswerving love that, two years before, she had promised him, that even in the first bitterness of her grief her thought was of him and not of herself.

"Love you? I *must* love you while my life lasts. Nothing could change me to you; if you were to err, to alter, to fall as low as man can fall, you would but be the dearer to me; and if all the world stoned and hooted you, I would cling the closer to you, and we would defy it, or endure it—together!"

She spoke again, with her old vehemence, her arms twining close about his neck, her lips soft and warm against his cheek, her eyes gazing up into his, dark and brilliant with the impassioned love that was the life of her life; then—the passion faded from her eyes, the glow from her face; with a convulsive sob her head drooped upon her breast, and she fell forward on his arm, weeping hopelessly, wearily, agonizedly, as I saw a woman in the Crimea weep over her husband's grave.

"God help me! I do not know what I say. If I am wrong, tell me; if I sin, slay me—but cease to love you I cannot!"

## PART THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

## I.

## THE TEMPTATION OF A LIFE.

IN a few broken, earnest words, De Vigne told her of that fatal marriage-bond which had cost him his mother's life, stained his own name, banished him from his ancestral home, cursed his life with a bitter and futile regret, and now brought misery on a life dearer than his own; and it touched him deeply to see, as she listened to his story, how utterly her own sorrow was merged into her grief for him; her misery at all he had suffered in his cruel bondage; her loathing, at the thought of all he had borne for those eleven long years, in even nominal connection with such, as her quick perception had told her the Trefusis must be. It touched him deeply to see how her own wrongs, and his want of candor and of truth toward her, faded away unremembered in her grief and sympathy for him, and she was more dear, more dangerous to him in that hour of suffering, than in her most brilliant, her most tender, her gayest, sweetest, or most bewitching moments.

Wrapt in that silent communion, absorbed in the bitterness in which the first moments of their reunion were steeped, neither heard a footfall on the forest turf, nor saw the presence of one, who, drawing near them, looked on the completion of that vengeance which had struck its first blow so many years before, and now came to deal its last. They neither saw nor heard her, till her chill, coarse, harsh tones stirred the sweet, soft air.

"Miss Tressillian, two years ago you chose to disbelieve,

or feign to disbelieve, my claims upon your lover. Ask Major De Vigne now, in my presence, if he can dare to deny that I am his lawful wedded wife?"

With an involuntary cry of horror, Alma looked up, instinctively clinging closer to De Vigne in the presence of this woman, so loathsome and so hateful to them both. With a fierce oath he sprang to his feet, standing once more face to face, as he had stood at the marriage-altar of Vigne, with the woman whom the Church had made his wife. There they met at last in the solemn, silent aisles of the great royal forest, heaven above head, nature around so calm, so fair, so peaceful; there they met at last, those two fierce foes whom the marriage-laws assumed to hold as "two whom God had joined together!" she looking at him with her cruel laugh, a leering triumph in her cold glittering eyes, a devilish sneer upon her lip, hating him with the chill, ceaseless hate which evil natures feel for those whom they have wronged; he gazing down on her, his brow crimson with the conflicting passions warring in him, his eyes flashing fire on her, his face dark with the anger, the loathing, and the scorn the very sight of her at such a moment roused in him. Between him, clinging to his arm in vague terror for him, as if to shield him from the cruel hatred of his wife and deadliest foe—clinging to him as if she defied all power to part them, yet feared some hand stronger than her own which would wrench them asunder—was the woman he loved. On the one hand, the she-devil that had cursed his life; on the other, the better angel, which had nestled in his heart to touch all its deeper chords and waken all its purer aspirations.

The Trefusis looked at him, and smiled a smile that chilled his blood as the cold gleam of the dagger in the moonlight chills the blood of a man waking from sweet

dreams to find himself fettered and bound in the clutches of his most cruel foe.

"Ask him, Miss Tresaillian!" she said again. "You disbelieved me. See if Granville De Vigne, who in by-gone days used to boast very grandly of his truth and honor, dare tell you a lie before my face, and say that I am not his lawful wife."

Cold and haughty rushed the words to Alma's lips, her dark-blue eyes flashing with the scorn and the fire latent in her semi-Southern nature, and impetuous passion blazing into flame:

"Major De Vigne would not lower himself so far to your level as to tell a falsehood, though he well might be tempted to renounce the stain upon his name of connection with such as yourself. But he has nothing to confess. I know all; and if the sorrow be his, the shame of his marriage rests solely upon you."

The Trefusis laughed scornfully to cover her mortification. She had never counted on De Vigne having himself confessed his marriage, and she was cheated of her wished-for triumph in tearing from him his last love, in seeing his haughty head bowed before her, and in driving from his side the woman whom she hated, for that one cutting speech at St. Crucis, almost as bitterly as she hated him.

She laughed that coarse, harsh laugh which, with many other of the traces of her origin and her innate vulgarity, had crept out since, her aim now attained, she had flung off that ever-uncongenial gloss and varnish of refinement which she had assumed to lure De Vigne.

"You take the high hand, young lady! Well, you are very wise to make the most of a bad bargain; and since you cannot be his wife, to pretend it is the more honorable post to be his mistress! I wish you joy; his love has ever been so very famous for its constancy!"

"Woman! silence!" broke in De Vigne, so fiercely, that even the Trefusis paused for the moment, and shrank from the lurid fire flashing from his eyes, and the dark wrath gathered in his face. "If you dare to breathe another of your brutal insults in her ear, I vow by Heaven that your sex shall not shield you from my vengeance. You have wronged me enough. You shall not venture to try your coarse insolence and ribald jests on one as high above you in her purity and nobility and truth as yon heavens are above the earth! My love, my darling!" he whispered passionately, bowing his head over Alma, who still clung to his arm, her color changing from a crimson flush to an ashy whiteness, her face full of horror, terror, loathing, scorn at the first coarse words that had ever been spoken to her—that had ever breathed to her of shame! "do not heed her; do not listen to her. She is a bold, bad woman, who cares not what she says, so that it may sting or injure me. Oh, God, forgive me! that I should have brought you into this!"

"Purity! nobility!" re-echoed the Trefusis, with her cold, loud laugh. "Since when have those new idols had any attraction for you, cher Granville? In by-gone days all you used to care for were, if I recollect rightly, a carnation bloom and a fine figure; and if the external pleased your senses, I never knew you care particularly for the over-cleanliness of mind and character. How long have you begun to learn platronics? The rôle will hardly suit you long, I fancy. Why, we shall have you 'moral' next, and preaching 'pure' religion. A leopard cannot change his spots, we have holy authority for believing; nor can you change your nature, and keep faithful six months together. If Miss Tressillian likes to be added to the string of your cast-off loves, it is no concern of mine, though you *are* my husband."

His face grew white as death; he to stand by and hear Alma insulted thus? With a fierce gesture he lifted his arm; forgetful of her sex, he would have struck her in his wrath, his grief, his insulted pride, his maddened passions; but Alma caught his arm:

*"For my sake——"*

The low, trembling words, the touch of her little soft hand, the sight of her pale, upraised face, with its dark fond eyes, stood between him and his passion as no other thing on earth would have done. For "her sake" his arm dropped, and he stopped in that mad anger in which, if he had given reins to it, he could have murdered the woman who, not content with vengeance upon him, must come to wreak it on another dearer than himself. The dark blood surged again over his brow; he put his hand upon his breast, as he had done at the marriage-altar, to keep down the storm of passions raging in his heart.

"Out of my sight, out of my sight," he muttered, "or by Heaven I shall say or do that you will wish to your dying day unsaid and undone!"

Something in the grand wrath of his tempestuous and fiery nature awed and stilled even the Trefusis; a dogged sullenness overspread her face; she was foiled and mastered, and for the first time her revenge was wrested from her grasp. Whether she would have left him subdued by a nature even stronger than her own, or whether she would have stood her ground and expended the vulgar anger of her character in coarse jests and ribald sneers, I cannot tell; for at that minute light laughter and lighter footsteps, and low merry voices, broke on their ear, and through the beech-boughs of the Gros Fonteau came Madame de la Vieillecour and her party, who, having a sort of fête champêtre in the forest, had come to look for La Petite Tressillian, whom they had left alone, at her

own request, to sketch the sunlight glancing off and on among the massive branches and budding leaves of Riche-lieu's Oak.

Madame de la Vieillecour recognized De Vigne with surprise; she saw, moreover, that she and her party were come at an untimely season on a painful scene; but, like a well-bred woman of the world, showed neither astonishment nor consciousness, but coming forward with her delicate gloved hands outstretched, welcomed him home with pleasant fluent French words of congratulation and pleasure.

It was well for him that he had learnt, long years before, the first lesson society gives its pupils: to smile when their hearts are breaking; to seem calm and courteous when fiercest thoughts are rioting within; to wear a pleasant, tranquil, unmoved air while the vultures gnaw at their life-strings, as the Indian at his funeral pyre smiles on those who would fain see him quiver and hear him groan. It was well for him that he had learnt "good breeding" in its most essential point; knew how to suffer and give no sign—a lesson they learn to the highest perfection who suffer most—or he could hardly have answered Madame de Vieillecour as he did, calmly, courteously listening to her fluent congratulations, while the stormy passions, just aroused in all their fullest strength, raged and warred in his heart; while on the one side stood the woman he so passionately loved, on the other the wife he as passionately loathed.

"Come back to dinner with us," continued Madame de Vieillecour; "the carriages are waiting near. Alma, ma belle, you look ill; you are tired, and the sun has been too hot."

She turned away with her gay party, talking to De Vigne, who instinctively followed and answered the Duch-



ess, who kept up the flow of conversation for him; he dared not look into that fair, fond face beside him, nor she into his. Suddenly the clear, cold, hard tones of the Trefusis, at whom, since his last words, he had not glanced, and whom Madame de la Vieillecour had not observed in the demi-lumière of the forest, which was growing dark, now that the sun had set, hissed through the air, arresting all:

"Granville, may I trouble you for a few words before you leave? I thought it was not *comme il faut* for a husband to accept an invitation before his wife's face in which she was not included!"

Madame de la Vieillecour turned suddenly; the harsh and rapid English was lost on the rest of her party, but she, despite all her tact and high breeding, stared first at the speaker, then at De Vigne.

"Mais!—quelle est donc cette femme!"

He did not hear her; he had swung round, his face, even to his lips, white and livid with passion—passion too deep and concentrated to find for the moment vent in words. Careless of all observers, Alma clasped both hands upon his arm:

"Do not go," she whispered. "Come with me. Do not stay with her, if you love me!"

For once he was deaf to her prayer; his lips quivered, his eyes filled with lurid fire; it was unutterable torture to have that woman—bold, bad, hateful, all that he knew her to be—stand there and claim him as her husband, with that fiendish laugh and coarse exultation, before the one so unspeakably dear and precious to him—torture that goaded him till he felt rather devil than man. "A few words with me! Yes! we will have a few more words. By Heaven, they shall be such as you will remember to your grave."

Alma clung to his arm, breathless, trembling, white with fear, as he muttered the words fiercely under his breath.

"Granville, Granville, if you love me, do not stay with her! She will madden you, she will kill you, she will make you do something you will repent. For my sake, come; leave her to do and say her worst. She is beneath your vengeance!"

For the first time he was deaf to her entreaties—for the first time he would not listen to her voice. He put her hands off his arm, and answered her in the same low whisper:

"Go, my darling; I will rejoin you. Fear nothing from me; she has already done her worst, and in all I do or say while my life lasts, I shall remember *you*. Go!"

He spoke gently, but too firmly for her to resist him. He turned to Madame de la Vieillecour:

"Allow me, Madame, to speak a few words with this person. I will rejoin you as soon as possible. You do not dine till nine?"

"Not till nine! I will leave a horse for you at the entrance of the Gros Fouteau—*au revoir*!"

Certain indistinct memories arose in the Duchess's mind of a story her brother, poor little Curly! had told her, long ago, of some unhappy and ill-assorted marriage his idol and his chief, Granville De Vigne, had made. With ready tact she hastened to cover whatever was disagreeable to him, and with a quick guess at the truth, she glanced at Alma's face, and tapped her on the shoulder with her parasol:

"Va t'en petite; il commence à faire froid et ces beaux yeux bleux sont trop chers à trop du monde, pour que je te permette de t'enrhumer."

They went; a turn in the road soon hid them from sight, and De Vigne and the woman who called herself his wife were left in the twilight, deepening around them. They stood alone; the clear soft skies above, the great shadows

of the mighty forest deepening slowly toward them over the velvet turf. For a moment neither spoke. Perhaps the memory was too strong in both of eleven years before, when they had stood thus face to face before the marriage-altar, to take those vows—on one side a lie and a fraud, on the other a curse life-long and inexorable.

Alma knew him aright—this woman did madden him. She had set light to all the hottest passions in him, and they now flared and raged far beyond any power of his to still them. Fiery as his nature was, the hate and anguish to which the past hour had roused him, his loathing for this woman, who only bore his name to dishonor it and only used the tie of wife to torture and insult him, overmastered reason and self-control, and unloosed the bonds of all that was darker and fiercer in his character, which lay unstirred in him as in a lesser or a greater measure in the hearts of all men.

She spoke first, with that coarse sneer upon her face which roused him and stung him more bitterly than anything—the sneer that had been on her lips when she signed her name in the register at Vigne:

“Granville De Vigne, we have met at last! It is twenty years since we parted at Frestonhills. You have found my promised revenge no child’s play, no absurd bombast as you fancied it, eh? I befooled you, I intoxicated you. I led you on, against counsel, reason, prudence. I made you offer me your name, your grand old name which you prized so high! I won you as my husband, *my husband* ‘until death us shall part.’ Do you remember the sweet words of the marriage service that bound us together for life, *mon cher*? I won you as my husband—I, the beggar’s daughter! I have driven you from your home; I have made the memory of your mother a weight of remorse to you forever; I have cheapened your name, and made it

hateful to you; I have exiled you often from your country; I stand a bar, as long as you and I shall live, to your peace and happiness. You laughed once when I vowed to be revenged on you; you can hardly laugh at it now!"

"Oh! devil incarnate!" burst from De Vigne, all the mad agony in him breaking bounds. "Oh! wretch, divorced in truth from the day we stood together at the altar, evil enough I have done, but not enough to be cursed with you! Have I been so far worse than my fellow-men that I must needs be punished with such cruel chastisement? You were revenged; your lust for position and money made you plan out schemes which—I being drunk with madness—succeeded and triumphed. But hardened as you are, you may tremble at the fiend you raise in me. I tell you in your wildest dreams you never pictured, in his fiercest wrath no mortal ever felt, the hate—the fearful hate—that I now feel for you!"

She laughed again—that coarse, cold, brutal laugh, which thrilled through every inmost fiber of his nature.

"No doubt you do, for the bonds by which I hold you are those that neither church nor law, wealth nor desire, once forged, can break. You want your freedom, Granville De Vigne; but while I live you know well enough that do what you may you will never have it. You want to wash off the stain from your name. You want to go back to your lordly home without my memory poisoning the air. You want your liberty, if only on the old plea for which you used to want all things that were not easy to get, because it is unattainable. Of course you hate me! Perhaps that golden-haired child whom I found you weeping over so pathetically, finding mere love an unprofitable connection, wanted to work on you to put your freedom in *her* hands, and you would fain be quit of me to pay down the price again for a new passion——"

With a fierce spring like a panther, De Vigne seized her

by the arm, while even she recoiled from the dark passion lowering on his brow and flaming in his eyes.

"Dare to breathe one word of her again, and I shall forget your sex! Her name shall never be polluted by passing your lips, nor her purity sullied by even a hint from your coarse mind. Let her alone, I tell you, or by Heaven it may be worse for you than you ever dream!"

She quailed before the passion in his voice, the strength of the iron grip in which he held her; but her fiendish delight in goading him to fury outweighed her fear. She laughed again.

"Sullied! polluted! I fancy your protection will do that more completely than my pity. Remember, your love damns a woman almost as utterly as the Roman Emperor's approach! Remember, the world will hardly believe in the purity and nobility on which it now pleases you to sentimentalize so prettily; it will hardly believe in them from a *lion* like Granville De Vigne, especially when he selects for his inamorata one of Vane Castleton's forsaken loves!"

An oath, so fierce, that it startled even her, stopped her in her jeering, coarse, and hardened slander. The boiling oil was flung upon the seething flames, lashing them into fury. He was stung past all endurance, and the insult to his strongest and most precious love, the slander of the woman whom he knew as noble and as stainless as any child of man can ever be, goaded him on to madness. Anger, fury, hatred, entered into him in their fullest force; he neither knew nor cared in that moment what he did; the blood surged over his brain, and flamed in his veins like molten fire; he seized her in his grasp as a tiger on his prey.

"Woman, devil, silence! Oh that you were of my sex, that I could wreak such vengeance on you for your

slandrous lies as you should carry with you to the grave!"

Her fierce and cruel eyes looked into his in the dull gray twilight, with that leer and triumph in them with which she gloated over the misery she caused.

"You would kill me if I were a man? I dare say, though I am a woman, you would scarcely scruple to do so if you were not afraid of the law, which is inexorable on murder as on marriage! You would not be the first husband who killed his wife when he fell in love with another woman, though whether it would honor your boasted escutcheon much——"

She stopped, stricken with sudden awe and fear at the passion she had stung and tortured into being. As his eyes looked down into hers with the fury she had roused, and the iron grip of his hands clinched harder and harder upon her, for the first time it flashed upon her that she was *in his power*—the power of the man she had so bitterly wronged, and whom she had now goaded on to reckless fury and maddened despair. She knew his fiery passions—she knew his lion-like strength—she knew his cruel and unavenged wrongs, and she trembled, and shivered, and turned pale in his relentless grasp, for she was in his hands, and had aroused a tempest she knew not how to lay.

"Wretch! fiend! if you tempt me to wash out my wrongs, and slay you where you stand, your blood will be on your own head!"

His voice, as it hissed in the horrible whisper, sounded strange even to his own ear, every nerve in his brain thrilled and throbbed, flashes of fire danced before his eyes, through which he saw cold, cruel, hateful, the face of his temptress and his foe. The cool pale heavens whirled around him, the giant forms of the forest trees seemed dark and ghastly.

shapes laughing at his wrongs and goading him to crime. His grasp tightened and tightened on her; she had no strength against him; her life was in his power—that life which only existed to do him such hideous wrong; that life which stood an eternal bar between him and love, and peace, and honor; that one human life which stood barring him out from heaven, and which in one flash of time he could snap, and still, and destroy forever from his path, which its presence so long had cursed.

They were alone, shrouded and sheltered in the dim solitude of the coming night; there were no witnesses in that dense forest, no eyes to see, no ears to listen, no voices to whisper whatever might be done under the cover of those silent beechwood shades.

That horrible hour of temptation!—coming on him when, with every passion stung to madness, his blood glowed ready to receive the poison! The night was still around them, there was not a sound, save the sigh of the forest leaves; not a thing to look upon them, save the little crescent moon and the evening star, rising from the dying sun-rays. Night and Solitude—twin tempters—gathered round him; his heart stood still, his brain was on fire, his eyes blind and dizzy; alone, out of the gray and whirling haze around him he saw that cold, cruel face, with its mocking, fiendish gaze, and clear and horrible the voice of a fell Temptation whispered in his ear, “Her life is in your hands, revenge yourself. Wash out the stain upon your name, win back the liberty you crave, efface the loathsome insults on the woman you love. You hate her, and she stands between you and the heaven you crave—take the life that destroys your own. For your love, she gave you fraud; for your trust, betrayal; for your name, disgrace. Avenge it! It is just! One blow, never heard, and never known by any mortal thing, and you have freedom back, and love!”

His brain reeled under the horrible temptation ; unconsciously his grasp tightened and tightened upon her, too strong for her to have power or movement left. The night whirled around him, the pale-blue skies grew crimson as with blood, the great gnarled trunks of the trees seemed to mock and grin like horrid spirits, goading him to evil, his passions surged in madness through his veins ; and clear and horrible he seemed to hear a tempter's voice : "Avenge your wrongs and you are free !" With a cry, a throe of agony, he flung the fell allurements from him, and threw her from his grasp. "Devil, temptress ! thank Heaven, not me, I have not murdered you to-night !" She lay where he had thrown her in his unconscious violence, stunned, less by the fall than by the terror of the moment past—that moment of temptation that had seemed eternity to both. She lay on the fresh forest turf, dank with the glittering evening dews, and he fled from her—fled as men flee from death or capture—fled from that crime which had lured him so nearly to its deadly brink—which so nearly had cursed and haunted his life with the relentless terror, the hideous weight of a human life silenced and shattered by his hand, lain by his deed in its grave, sent by his will from its rightful place and presence in the living, laughing earth, into the dark and deadly mysteries of the tomb.

He fled from the hideous temptation which had assailed him in that hour of madness—he fled from the devil of Opportunity to which so many sins are due, and from whose absence so many virtues date. He fled from it ; flinging it away from him with a firm hand, not daring to stay to test his strength by pausing in its presence. He fled on and on, in the still gray twilight gloom, through the dense, silent forest, its trembling leaves, and falling dews, and evening shadows ; he fled on under the gaunt boughs and tangled aisles of the woodland ; all the darkest pas-



sions of his nature warring and rioting within him. Dizzy with the whirling of his brain, every nerve in his mind and body strung to tension, quivering and throbbing with the fierce torture of the ordeal past, he flung himself, half-conscious, on the cool fresh turf with a cry of agony and thanksgiving.

The last faint sun-glow faded from the west, the silver cimeter of the young moon rose over the forest, the twilight deepened, and the night came down on Fontainebleau, veiling town and woodland, lake and palace, in its soft and hallowing light; still he lay upon the turf under the beech-trees, exhausted with the conflict and the struggle of the great passions at war within him; worn out with that fell struggle with Temptation, where submission had been so easy, victory so hard. And as the twilight shadows deepened round him, and the dews gathered thicker on the whispering leaves, and the numberless soft voices of the night chimed through the silent forest glades, he thanked God that his heart was free, his hands stainless, from the guilt which, if never known by his fellow-men, would yet have haunted him with its horrible presence throughout his life, poisoned the purest air he breathed, turned the fairest heaven that smiled on him into a hell, waked him from his sweetest sleep to start and shudder at the chill touch of remembered crime, and cursed his dying bed with a horror that would have pursued him to the very borders of his grave. He thanked God that for once in his life he had resisted the mad temptation of the hour, and thrust away the devil of Thought ere it had time to fester into Deed; he thanked God that the dead weight of a human life was not upon his soul, to rise and drive him, Orestes-like, from every haven of rest, to damn him in his softest hours of joy, to make him shrink from the light of heaven, and tremble at the rustle of the forest trees, and quail be-

fore the innocent and holy beauty of the earth he had crimsoned with his guilt. He thanked God with passionate gladness and trembling awe at the peril past—that he could meet the innocent eyes of the woman he loved without that secret on his soul—that he could take her hands without staining them with the guilt on his—that he could hold her to his heart without the deadly presence of that crime with which, to win her, he would have darkened earth and burdened both their lives. He thanked God that he could stand there in the solemn aisles of the Forest Temple free at least from the curse of that terrible crime, and feel the soft wind fan his hair, and hear the sweet sighing of the woodland boughs, and look upward to the fair, calm heavens bending over him in the solemn and holy stillness of the night without the myriad voices of the earth calling on him to answer for the crime into which his passions had hurried him, and rising up silent but ruthless witnesses against him—that he could stand there under the fair evening stars, free, saved, stainless from the guilt that had tempted him in the darkest hour of his life, able to look up with a clear brow and a fearless conscience into the pure and holy eyes of night!

## PART THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

## I.

## FIDELITY.

It is strange how the outer world surrounds yet never touches the inner; how the gay and lighter threads of life intervene yet never mingle with those that are darkest and sternest, as the parasite clings to the forest tree, united yet ever dissimilar! From the twilight gloom of the silent forest, from solitude and temptation and suffering, from the fell torture of an hour when thought and opportunity, twin tempters, lured him on to crime, De Vigne passed suddenly into the glitter and glow and brilliance, the light laughter and the ringing jests, and the peopled salons of the Diaman du Forêt. From the dense woods and the stirless silence of the night, only haunted by the presence of the woman who had cursed his life and well-nigh lured him to irrevocable and ineffaceable guilt, he came by abrupt transition into a gay and brilliant society, from which all somber shadows were banished, and where its groups, laughing, jesting, flirting, carrying on the light intrigues of the hour, seemed for the time as though no sorrow or suffering, bitterness or passion, had ever intruded among them. Strange contrast! those glittering salons and that dark and deadly solitude of the beech woods of the Gros Fouteau—not stranger than the contrast between the coarse, cruel, hateful face that had lured him to crime and misery in the dense shadow of the forest gloom, and the one, delicate, high-bred, impassioned, with its radiant, earnest regard, and its gleaming, golden hair, on which he

looked as, when away from the gayety and the glitter, the gossip and the mots, the light laughter and the subdued murmur of society, he drew her, after awhile, unnoticed, out on to the terrace which overlooked the wooded and stately gardens of the Diaman du Forêt, where the moonbeams slept on lawn and lake, avenue and statue, in the calm May night, that shrouded Fontainebleau, town and palace and forest, in its silvery mist.

Neither of them spoke; love, memory, thought were too deep and too full in both for words, and neither could have found voice to utter all that arose in their hearts at the touch of each other's hand, the gaze of each other's eyes, the sense of each other's presence.

Dark and heavy upon them was the weight of that past hour. Silent they stood together in the solitude of the night that was calm, hushed, and peaceful, fit for a love either more tranquil or more fully blessed than theirs.

His voice was hoarse and broken as he spoke at last, bowing his head over her.

"You can love me—after this?"

She did not answer him, she only lifted her eyes to his face. By the silvery gleam of the night he could see the unswerving fidelity, after all, through all, promised him for all eternity while her heart should beat and her eyes have life to gaze upon his face.

Words were all too feeble and too chill to thank her; he bowed his head and pressed his lips on hers. Now he knew, never again to doubt it, how unwearingly and how entirely this imperishable and unselfish love that he had won would cling round him to his dying day. The night was still; not a murmur stirred among the trees, not a breath moved upon the surface of the little lake, not a cloud swept across the pale, pure stars, gleaming beyond in the blue heavens. The earth was hushed in deep re-

pose, nature slept the solemn and tranquil sleep which no fret and wrath of man has power to weaken or arrest; while he, the mortal, with human love trembling on his lips, and human suffering quivering in his heart, told in broken earnest words to the woman who would cling to him through all, the confession of that dire temptation which so nearly had ripened into crime. He laid his heart bare to her, with all its sins and weaknesses, its errors and its impulses, fearlessly, truthfully, because she had taught him at last that the love that is love will not shrink from its idol because it finds him mortal, but rather, should his errors be deeper than his fellows, veil them with tender touch, and cling but the firmer and the closer to him in the valley of the shadow of death. He laid his heart bare to her as he had never done to any living thing, knowing that his trust was sacred, secure of sympathy, and tenderness, and pity. He spoke to her as men can never speak to men, as they can seldom speak to women. He told her of that deadly Temptation, that darker nature born in him, as more or less in all, which had slumbered unknown, till opportunity awoke it, and then, aroused in all its force, had wrestled so hardly with all that was merciful, gentle, and better in him. He told her of that fell Tempter of thought which had arisen so suddenly in night and solitude, and whispered him to a deed that would give him back his freedom, avenge his wrongs, and shatter the fetters that weighed him down with their unmerited burden. He told how he had fled from it, how he had conquered it, how he had escaped with pure hands and stainless soul to render thanks to God for his deliverance in the solemn forest-aisles of that temple where man best meets the mystery of Deity—the great temple of the universe which human hands never fashioned, and human creeds, and follies, and priestcraft cannot enter to lower and pollute.

He told her, laying bare to her all that was darkest in him, all the deadly crime begotten in his heart, and so well-nigh wrought by his hand into the black guilt with which one human life stifles and tramples out another. He told her, concealing nothing: then, again, he asked her:

"Can you love me—after this?"

She lifted up her face, that was white as death where the light of the moon shone upon it; and her voice was low and tremulous, yet sustained with the great heroic tenderness that did not shrink from him in his sin, that did not recoil from him in his fell temptation, that forgot and washed out its own wrong in the deep waters of an exhaustless love.

"I shall love you while I have life! I have said it; I can say no more. Let the world condemn you—you are the dearer to *me*! Our love can be no crime in God's sight."

He crushed her closer in his arms.

"*Crime!* Great Heaven! You are my wife in heart. Such love as yours binds us with stronger force, and consecrates holier tie, than any priestcraft can ever forge. *She is not* my wife in the sight of Heaven. Reason, right, sense, justice, all divorced her from the very hour I left her at the altar, my bitter enemy, my relentless foe, who won me by deceit, who would have made my life a hell, who renders me a devil, not a man! *She* my wife! Great God, I renounce her! Let men prate of their laws and of her rights how they choose——"

Alma, as the fierce words were muttered in his throat, clung to him, her voice low and dreamy, like the voice of one in feverish pain.

"She is no wife of yours—a woman that could hate you and betray you! She is no wife of yours—a woman whom you left at the altar! How can they bind you to her?"

"They may!—I care not, save that she holds the name that should be yours. This was all that was wanting to fill up the measure of my hate for her. Let fools go babble of her claims upon me if they will. From the hour we parted at the altar I never saw her face until this night; from this night I divorce her before God. She is no wife of mine; her rights are mere legal quibbles, love never forged, fidelity never sanctified, God never blessed them. I claim my heritage of justice as a man—my right to live, to love, to taste the common happiness of my fellows. The very birds around us find their mates. Why are we, alone of all the earth, to be wrenched apart, and condemned to live and die asunder? Why are we, alone, to be forced to surrender all that makes life of joy and value? Alma!—surely we love well enough to defy the world together?"

He paused abruptly, his frame shook with the great passions in him, which were stronger than his strength; the words broke from him unawares—the words that would decide their fate! Her face was flushed to a deep scarlet glow as he looked down on it by the silvery light of the moon, her hands closed tighter upon his, her lip quivered, and he felt her slight, delicate form tremble in his arms. She clung closer to him still, her breathing hurried and low, like broken, rapid sighs; her eyes, humid and dark as night, fell beneath his; that one word, "together," stirred the depths of her heart as the storm-winds the depth of the sea. Two years before she would have scarce comprehended the extent of the sacrifice asked of her more than Mignon or Haidee, scarce known more fully than they all it called on her to surrender. Now she knew its meaning: knew that this man, who was thus pitilessly cursed for no crime, no error, but simply for a mistake—the fatal and irrevocable mistake of early marriage—would

be condemned by the world if he took his just heritage of freedom; knew that, for a divine compassion, an imperishable love, she, who clung to him, would be laid by social law beneath a social ban, would be forbid by it from every sphere and every honor that were her due by birth, by intellect, by right. She knew her sacrifice; she knew that she should decide the destiny of her whole future; and the proud nature, though strong enough to defy both, was one to abhor any free glance, to resent every scornful word: the haughty and delicate spirit was one to feel keenly, yielding one inch of her just place. But—she loved, and the world was far from her; she loved, and her life lay in his. Fidelity is the marriage-bond of God; the laws of man cannot command it, the laws of man are void without it. Would she not render it unto him, even to her grave? Would she not be his wife in the sight of Heaven? Suffering for him would be proudly borne, sacrifice to him would be gladly given. She would have followed him to the darkness of the tomb; she would have passed with him through the furnace of the fires, content, always content, so that her hands were closed on his, so that she had strength to look up to his face.

This is sin, say you? Verily, if it be so, it is the sublimest sin that ever outshone virtue!

He bent his head lower and lower, and his words were hoarse and few.

"Can you love me—enough for this? Alma! we *cannot* part!"

He felt a shudder as of icy cold run through his frame at that last ghastly word, as she lay folded in his embrace. By the white light of the moon he saw the scarlet blush upon her face waver, and burn, and deepen; quick, tremulous sighs heaved her heart; her arms wreathed and twined closer and closer about him; her eyes gleamed with an



undying and eternal love, as they met his own in the pale, soft radiance of the stars.

"We *cannot* part! You are my world, my all! Your will is mine!"

The words were spoken that gave her to him.

The whisper died away, scarce stirring the air; the love that trembled in it was too deep for speech; the fevered flush upon her face glowed warm, then changed to a marble whiteness. She clung to him closer still, and passionate tears, born from the strong emotions of the hour, welled slowly up, and fell from those eyes which she had first lifted to his when she was a little child, flinging flowers at him in the old library at Weivehurst. She loved him, she pitied him; she would forsake all to give him back that happiness of which another's fraud had robbed him. She thought of nothing then save him; and if he had stretched out his hand and bade her follow him into the dark, cold shadows of the grave, she would have gone with him fondly, fearlessly, unselfishly, still thinking only of him; what comfort she could give, what trial share, what pain avert. She loved him. The world, I say, was very far from Alma then—as far as the fret, and noise, and bustle of the city streets are from the fair and solemn stars of heaven.

And in the stillness of the night their lips met. She would give up the world for him.

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One oath De Vigne had sworn as he lay on his sick-bed at Scutari, to revenge—before he surrendered himself to any love or any happiness—to revenge on Vane Castleton the insult with which he had outraged every sentiment of delicacy, chivalry, or honor, and brand him, so that the stain could never leave his name, as coward and as scoundrel. He swore afresh to do it before Alma's name was

linked in any way with his own, and the Trefusis's words in the forest that night had spurred his resolve into still steadier purpose. He left the Diaman du Forêt that night, to return straight to England and work out what he held a primary and paramount obligation—the chastisement of the brute insult with which the woman he loved had been outraged. To her he said nothing of his errand, leaving her, indeed, in ignorance that he would not be with her on the morrow; but, ere he quitted Paris by the earliest train in the gray morning, he wrote to her from Meurice's words his honor bade him write—words that he could not find strength to utter while her kiss was on his cheek, while her heart was prisoned against his own. Even to pen them while the dawn was still and cold about him, and he sat in the silence of his own solitary chamber, was hard to him in the rapture that coursed through his veins, and steeped his life in one golden, intoxicating joy, at the single thought, "*She will be mine,*"—cost him a bitter effort in the delirium of an hour in which his one keen, stinging regret, that he must take some sacrifice from the woman who loved him, was lost and forgot, as the throb of departing pain is barely heeded in the delicious languor of the Morphine, that yields us voluptuous ease after long and weary torture.

These were the final words he wrote:

"I must leave you for a few hours—a few days at farthest. One who loved you more unselfishly perhaps than I, bade me in his dying hour try, if I found you again to leave you forever. It is easy to counsel; but, great Heaven! to bid a man renounce the only earthly treasure he has, at the very hour he has recovered it—who could have strength to do it? I, at the least, have none. I am no stoic, no god. Alma!—the man you love is very mortal. Yes—one last word. Do not give yourself to me

without weighing well what it may cost you. Selfish I may be, God knows; though all I ask or seek is the happiness that is the commonest heritage of men, till their wrongs, or their errors, or their follies lose them their birthright forever! But I am not so utterly blind to all that is generous and just as to lead you, for my own sake, to such a sacrifice without bidding you pause to decide whether or no it will be recompensed to you by the sole reward that I can give it—my love and my fidelity. Think of it well; do not let one memory of me sway you in your decision. If it be only your divine pity, your sympathy in my fate, your unselfish wish to give me the joy that my own headlong folly has lost me, that prompts you, do not sacrifice yourself for me. I have brought the burden upon you, it is meet that I should bear it alone, rather than lead you, in your noble generosity, your trustful faith, to a sacrifice for me that in after-life you would look back on with regret. Such a one I could not, I would not, take from you. Weigh it well. Let no thought or pity for me sway you; weigh well, whether your love for me is really great enough to make life with me sufficient compensation for all else. And if, indeed, it *be* great enough for this, your life shall be a heaven upon earth, if man's tenderness can make it so; *my* love, God knows, *you* know, will never swerve!"

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## II.

### NEMESIS.

LORD VANE CASTLETON sat in his chamber in his chambers garnis, in St. James's Street, where he dwelt during the season, when he was not at that "evil cage" of his—

as the old woodsman had termed it—his villa at Windsor, where a woman's hand had struck him for a coward's deed. He sat in his chamber wrapped in his dressing-gown, smoking, breakfasting, reading the papers, and chatting with two of his particular chums, who had dropped in prior to driving down to see the Ascot Cup race run. They were talking of everything under the sun, at least the sun that shone on the West-end: of the chances of the field against the favorite; of the new ballet, and certain ankles that came out very strong in it; of the beauty of Coralie Coquelicot, *alias* Sarah Boggis, a new planet in the orbit of casinos; of the last escapade of that very fast little lionne, Leila Puffdoff; of Sabretasche's marriage, of which, by the way, I heard no less than a hundred and seventy-two *on dits*, the concluding and most charitable one being that of a little lady, well known in the religious as well as in the fashionable world, who whispered that his wife, poor dear innocent thing! had been put hors de vue in Naples by a stiletto, hired for that noble purpose by the Colonel's wealth. No one knew it, of course, but it was but too true, she feared! They were chatting over all the topics of their day as they smoked and breakfasted. Castleton was hardly up to the mark that morning; he was annoyed and irritated at several things: first, that he had serious doubts as to the soundness of Lancer's off-leg, and if Lancer did not come in at the distance winner of the Cup, Lord Vane's prospects would look blacker than would be desirable; in the second, the ministry had behaved with the grossest ingratitude to its staunch ally, the house of Tiara, by refusing him, through his father, a certain post he coveted, a piece of ill-natured squeamishness on their part, as they had but lately given a deanery to his brother, a spirit rather worse than himself; in the fourth, a larger number of little bills were

floating about than was pleasant, and if there was not speedily a general election, by which he could slip into one of those neat little boroughs that were honored by being kept in his Grace of Tiara's pocket, he was likely to be troubled with more applications than he could, not alone meet—of that he never thought—but stave off to some dim future era. Altogether, Castleton was not in an over good humor that morning; had sworn at his valet, and lashed his terrier till it howled for mercy, and found everything at cross purposes and a bore, from his chocolate, which was badly milled, to the news he had lately heard, that “the — Little Tressillian had come into some money, and had been taken up by old Molyneux,” news which gave him some nasty qualms, for “she’s a confounded plucky, skittish, hard-mouthed little devil,” thought he, “and if the story of that cursed folly of mine ever get afloat, it’ll do me no end of mischief; and if she go and tell people about it—and they’ll listen to her now she’s a little money and Helena has taken her up—I shall never hear the last of it. It would be an infernal case for the papers. She must be put a stop to, somehow—but how?” Which knotty point occupied Lord Vane (who detested Alma with as much vindictiveness as an exceedingly vindictive nature was capable of: first, for her words; secondly, for her blow; and thirdly, for her escaping and outwitting him) more than even the coming trial between Lancer and the field. So altogether Lord Vane was not in a good humor; he swore at his chocolate, he cursed the *Times*—that had just been browbeating the Duke of Tiara out of the ministry—he snarled at his friends, he dressed for Ascot, all in an exceedingly bad humor, and he was not in a better when, on issuing from his chamber to go to the drag that awaited him in the street below, he came suddenly face to face with the man he hated because he was the man that Alma Tressillian loved.

They met abruptly on the stairs as the one was quitting, the other approaching, the landing-place—they met abruptly, with barely a foot between them—De Vigne and Vane Castleton; he who had insulted her past all forgiveness, and he who would not have seen a hair of her head injured without revenging it. Involuntarily, they both stood silent for a moment. De Vigne looked at him, every vein in him tingling with passion, as he saw the man who had given him two years of torture—who had insulted the woman he idolized with his brutal love, his loathed caresses—who had put her name into the lips of other men, coupled with lies that leveled her with any other of his worthless fancies. He looked at him, recalling all that she had told him had been poured into her young ear in that horrible hour when she was in Vane Castleton's clutches. He looked at him; his lips pale, and set with a stern, fixed purpose; his large dark eyes burning with the hatred that was rioting within him; his right hand clinching hard on the riding-switch he held, as if he longed to change it into a deadlier and more dangerous weapon. Such insults as Vane Castleton had passed on Alma would have stirred the meekest peace-maker under heaven into righteous wrath, and armed the hand of the most spiritless, if it had had the least drop of manly blood or the least fiber of manly muscle in its veins and sinews. No wonder, then, that De Vigne, quick as David of Israel to wrath, with dark passions born in him from his fathers, the men of the old time, when a stainless shield was borne by an iron hand, and all wrongs were redressed with steel—hot in thought, quick in action, abhorring all that was mean, ungenerous, and cowardly—felt all that was fiercest and most fiery in his nature rise up in its strongest wrath when he stood face to face with the man who had tried to rob him of the woman he loved.

He seemed to hear his hateful love-vows, and Alma's piteous cry of terror and supplication; he seemed to see the loathsome caress with which he had dared to touch her pure soft lips, and the blow which her little delicate fingers had struck him in self-defense; he seemed to feel her struggling, as if for life or death, in the vulture clutches of her hated foe. What wonder that his hand clinched on his riding-whip, as if thirsting for that surer and deadlier weapon with which, in other days, his grandsires had defended their honor and their love!

Vane Castleton was no coward—had he been, the Tiara blood, bad though it might be in other ways, would have disowned him—he was no coward, yet at the eagle eyes that flashed so suddenly upon him, his own fell involuntarily for an instant, but only for an instant. He recovered himself in time to have the first word. He pushed his fine, fair curls off his low, white brow, with a sneer on his lips and in his cold, light eyes:

“De Vigne! My dear fellow, how are you? Didn't know you were in England. Come to rest yourself from that deuced hard campaign, eh?”

“No,” said De Vigne between his teeth, which were set like a lion's at the sight of his foe. “I am come for a harder task—to try and teach a scoundrel what honor and dishonor mean!”

His tones were too significant to leave Castleton in any doubt as to the application of his words. He drew in his lips with a nervous, savage twitch, and his light-blue eyes grew cold and angry. He laughed, with a forced sneer.

“Jealous! Are you come to bully me about that little girl of yours—little—what was her name—Trevanion, Trevelyan, Tressillian—something with a Tre, I know? Really, you will waste your wrath and your powder. I have nothing whatever to do with her; she did not take *me* in, though.

every one knows Major De Vigne, wise as he counts himself, fancied that consummate little intrigante a model of fidelity——”

The words had barely passed his lips—he could not finish his sentence—before De Vigne’s grasp was on him, tight, firm, relentless; he might with as much use have tried to escape from the iron jaws of a tiger seeking his prey as from the grasp of the man who loved Alma Tresillian. De Vigne’s face was white with passion, his eyes burning with fiery anger, the wrath that was in him quivering and thrilling in every vein and sinew—to hear her name on that liar’s lips! He seized him in his iron grasp, and shook him like a little dog.

“Blackguard! that is the last of your dastard lies you shall ever dare to utter. You are too low for the revenge one man of honor takes upon another; you are only fit to be punished as one punishes a yelping mongrel or a sneaking hound.”

Holding him there, powerless, in the grip of his right hand, he thrashed him with his riding-switch as a man would thrash a cur—thrashed him with all the passion that was in him, till the little whip snapped in two. Then he lifted him up, as one would lift a dead rat or a broken bough, and threw him down the whole stone flight of the staircase: in his wrath, he seemed to have the strength of a score of giants.

Castleton lay at the foot of the stairs, stunned and insensible. His valet and the people of the house gazed on the scene, too amazed to interrupt it or aid him. His two friends, standing in the street criticising the four roars in his drag, rushed in at the echo of the fall. De Vigne stepped over his body, giving it a spurn with his foot as he passed.



"The devil, De Vigne!" began one of them. "What's up—what's amiss?"

De Vigne laughed—a haughty sneer upon his face:

"Only a little lesson given to your friend, Lord Monckton. Few will disagree with me in thinking it wanted; if they do, I can always be heard of at White's or the United. Good day to you!"

As he walked out into the street to his horse, which was waiting for him, a small, sleek, fair man, with a dandified badine, and a generally showy get-up, altogether in appearance extremely like a hairdresser who passes himself off as a baron, or a banker's clerk who tries to look like a man of fashion—De Vigne's ex-valet and Crimean correspondent, the man Raymond, who had been turned away two years before for reading Alma's letter—came up to him with that deferential ceremoniousness which would have fitted him for a groom of the chambers.

"I beg your pardon, Major, for intruding upon you; but might I be allowed to inquire whether you received a letter from me when you were before Sebastopol?"

De Vigne signed him away with the broken handle of his whip:

"When I discharge my servants, I do not expect to be followed and annoyed with their impertinence."

"I mean no impertinence, Major," persisted the man, "and I should not be likely to intrude upon you without some warrant, sir. Did you read my letter?"

"Read it? Do you suppose I read the begging-letters with which rogues pester me? It is no use to waste your words here. Take yourself off!"

He spoke haughtily and angrily, as he put his foot in the stirrup; he remembered the share Raymond, then in Castleton's employ, had taken in that vile plot against Alma; but he would not degrade her by bringing her name up to

a servant, and lower both her and himself by stooping to resent the mere hired villainy of Castleton's abettor.

"It was not a begging-letter, Major," said Raymond, with a slight smile. "It would have told you something of great importance to you, sir, if you had chosen to read it. I can tell it you still, sir, and it is what you would bid any price to hear."

"Silence!" said De Vigne, as he threw himself across the saddle, turning his head to his own groom. "Ashley, give that man in charge; he is annoying me!"

De Vigne shook the bridle from his grasp, and rode away up St. James's Street.

"I have horsewhipped him, that stain will cling to him forever; but, by Heaven! if I had let my passions loose, I could have killed him," he muttered to himself, as he galloped down Pall Mall, bestowing no more thought on his quondam valet in the passion that still flamed in him despite his vengeance.

He could have slain him, "if God restrained not," and his own principle had not held the curb upon his wrath, as in that horrible night-hour in the forest of Fontainebleau. He could have slain him, the man who would have robbed him of his one earthly treasure; who *had* robbed him of her for two years. He could have slain him, the man who had polluted her name by association with his; who had tried to win her by fraud and insult; who had dared to lure her by the love he knew she bore another into his own cruel and hateful trap; who had dared to touch those young lips, stainless as any rose-leaves with the dew of dawn upon them, with his loathed and brutal caresses. He could have slain him, as Moses slew the Egyptian, in the fiery wrath and hatred of the moment; but he refrained, as David refrained from slaying Saul, when the man who had wronged him lay in his power, sleeping and

defenseless, in the still gloom of midnight. Oh! mes frères, virtue lies not, as some think, in being too pure for temptation to enter into us, but rather in proportion to the strength, the seduction, and the power of the temptation we resist. If there be such to whom like temptation never come, happy for them, their path through life is safe and easy. If they never know the delicious perfume of the rose-garland, they never know the bitterness of the fennel and amaranth; yet closer to human sympathies and dearer to human hearts—nobler, warmer, more natural—is the man who loves and hates, errs, struggles, and repents; is quick to joy and quick to pain; who may do wrong in haste, but is ever ready to atone, and who, though passing through the fire of his own thoughts, comes like gold worthier from the furnace.

Vane Castleton rose from that fall, sunk and degraded in his own eyes forever, with such a hell raging in his own heart as might have satisfied the direst vengeance. He had been thrashed by Granville De Vigne as a hound by its keeper; he knew that stigma would cling to him as long as he lived. Monckton, his valet, his groom, the people of the house, all had seen it; seen him powerless in De Vigne's grasp; seen him held and lashed, like a yelping puppy in a hunting-field. The tale would be told in circles of all classes; it would spread like wildfire. No food so dear to the generality as gossip—above all, gossip spiced with scandal—it would be known in his club, in his clique, all over town. He could not lounge into White's or the Guards' Club without the men knowing he had been horse-whipped by De Vigne—De Vigne, a man too popular and too esteemed for others to discredit or condemn him. Horsewhipped—the blackest, least irremediable stigma that can lie upon a man, branding him a coward whom another *has treated* as a dog. When he rose, bruised, sore, with

the white foam of anger on his lips, and the lash of De Vigne's riding-switch tingling and smarting on his shoulders, stung at last with the punishment of his own deeds, he—who had prided himself on his vices as other men on their virtues, who had done what he chose without paying or accounting for it to any one, who had earned for himself the sobriquet of "Butcher," for the unscrupulous cruelty with which he cleared everything that lay in his path away from it, heedless of mercy or justice—he had been punished for a lie and an insult—punished with such chastisement as, do what he would, would cling to his name, making it shame to him and ridicule to others as long as his life should last. Monckton lost no time in detailing, in that hot-bed of gossipry, a club-room, how "that dare-devil De Vigne pitched into poor Vane. Some row about a woman—I don't know who; but I can swear to the severity of the thrashing; and he kicked him afterward, by Jove! he did. Somebody should send it to the papers!"

Old Tiara, the rascally old man who, Heaven knows, had no business to throw pebbles at anybody—but it is always those who live in the most shattered glass houses that are most busy at that exploit—old Tiara, meeting him in St. James's Street, pushed him aside with his cane.

"I don't know you, sir, and if I did I wouldn't walk the length of the street with you, unless the club windows were empty." Chuckling in himself, too, as he said it; for if his son's humiliation was unpalatable to him as the first of Tiara blood that had ever had such a taint upon it—for if they were bad they were *game*—to humiliate him himself was sweet and highly amusing to the old man, who had learned in youth of Queensberry and Alvanley, Pierrepont and Brummel, and found the same pleasure in a sharp answer as his chaplain would have told him to do in a soft one.

Alma Tressillian was amply revenged. Castleton's debts, his difficulties, his mal odor in general, crowned by the story of his horsewhipping—a horsewhipping that he did not dare *revenger*, because of the evil deed that was the root of the quarrel, would make England too warm, or rather too cold, for him. He could not stay in town, cut by every man worth knowing; all his daily haunts, the club, the Ring, Pall Mall, and St. James's Street, would be filled by old acquaintance, who would either drop him entirely, or shake him off as plainly as they could; every house where he was wont to dine or lounge away his hours would be full of the story that Major De Vigne had thrashed him for an abominable insult to some woman; town would be closed to Castleton as effectually as though everybody had ostracized him. There were only left him casinos and Cafés Régences, sharpers and black-legs, and cut by his own father, and sent to Coventry by his own brothers, he slunk out of London and out of England. He lives at Paris and the Bads, devoting himself, I believe, to extraordinary skillful écarté, to roulette and trente et quarante; his society is not what one of the ducal house of Tiara might reasonably expect, and they tell me there is no more dangerous hand at trapping young pigeons, and fleecing them of all their valuable feathers, than Lord Vane Castleton. It is rather an unworthy office for one of his order, but chacun à leur goût, and a man if he be by nature a coward and a bully, dishonest and dishonorable, will grow up so, whether he was born in an ivory cradle or a strolling player's barn. Nature will out, and it will have the best of the game—unless education be powerful indeed, and so—Vane Castleton, with a great name, a good position, and every chance to make fair running in the race of life if he had chosen, born with the nature of the bully, the coward, and the sharper in him, sank at last, despite all, to their level.

## PART THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

## I.

## HOW FREEDOM CAME AT LAST.

WHEN De Vigne went back to the hotel, he found a letter from his steward, asking him to go down to Vigne, where business matters required his absolute and personal attention. He read the letter, put it down, and thought a minute over its contents. Vigne was hateful to him; he had never been there since he had quitted it on that fatal New Year's Day which had bound him to Constance Trefusis. Every association connected with it was one of keen and stinging pain, interwoven as they were with the one great irremediable mistake and misery of his life. One place, indeed, was dear and sacred to him—that one green grave under the shadowy elms, where his mother lay; but even there lingered and haunted bitter regret and vain remorse, since it was his folly, his headstrong and willful passion, which had sent her there—the mother whom he had loved so tenderly from the early hours when, as a young boy, he had loved to lean against her knee, sitting under the very shadow of those elms that now sheltered her grave under their fostering foliage. Vigne was full of dark and bitter memories to him; he had not visited it now for eleven long years, exiled from his ancestral home by the gaunt specter of the folly which there had first clung around his life, to bear him such after-fruits of misery. Yet now, whether Alma's love had made life bear a different coloring, he felt a vague wish and longing to see the old home where his careless childhood and his happy youth

had passed; the home where so many of his forefathers had lived; the home—nearest and holiest tie of all—the home where his mother had died. Alma would not be in England, whither she was coming with the Molyneux, for two days; if he should go and dwell with her in Italy or Southern France, he wished to see the old elm woods of Vigne before he left the country; he wished to see his mother's grave—his mother, the only woman that had ever loved him purely, devotedly, unselfishly, till Alma, poor child! spent all her wealth of love on him. Something impelled him to go down to Vigne as strongly as he had before loathed even the mention of revisiting it. That day he threw himself into the train, and went down to spend twenty-four hours under that roof where he had once slept the sweet, untroubled, dreamless sleep of childhood ere he knew the bitter sorrow and the delirious joys of manhood. They did not know he was coming, and there was no welcome for him, (so best, he could ill have borne it, remembering how he had quitted it;) there was only the flag flying from the west turret because he was returned in safety from the Crimea, and the old lodge-keeper's recognition of him as she looked into his face and burst into tears, for she had worshiped him from his birth, (though De Vigne, in his wayward, mischievous, high-spirited, care-for-nothing childhood, must have been a very troublesome divinity,) and had never thought to see him again before she laid her aged bones to rest. The old familiar things came with a strange thrill of memory upon him. Every turn of the approach—the shadowy double avenue, with its giant elms swaying their massive boughs backward and forward in the sunlight; the great sweep of park and woodland, forest and pasture, stretching away farther than the eye could reach; the clear, sweet ripple of the river, rushing under the hawthorns, white as new-fallen snow;

the scamper of the startled hares under the fan-like ferns; the distant belling of the rare red deer, trooping under the arching trees in the blue distance; the grand front of that magnificent pile that his ancestors had left him in heritage, with its stately terraces and turrets, its stretching lawns and gardens—a home too fair to be deserted by its lord and left to silence and to solitude—a home that should have had revelry in its halls and sweet laughter ringing to its stately roof, and love and joy filling its forsaken chambers with their soft silvery chimes—all came back upon him with a very anguish of memory, such a tightening of the heart, as we feel looking on the face of an old friend long parted, and tracing the difference in him and us since the joyous days of old gone by forever. He loved the place, for its own sake; he had been proud of it, for its grand beauty and its historic aroma, when he was yet a child, playing, light-hearted, free, and careless under the shade of its stately woods. He had loved it until it was cursed with the shadow of his unhappy marriage; till the dark memory of the woman who had taken his name haunted and poisoned the air, and filled every well-remembered scene of his home with the relentless ghost, ever pursuing, never eluded, following in the full glare of a noontide sun, as in the voiceless silence of the midnight hours; the spirit of an error in judgment, repented of, but irremediable: no sin, but what costs us dearer as the world goes—a folly.

That ghost pursued him at each step through all the old familiar scenes. He could not enter the great hall where he had seen her the first night she came to Vigne, standing under the gas glare in her dazzling, voluptuous, but ever coarse beauty, with her scarlet wreath over her raven hair, and her scarlet cloak flung half off from that divine form that had won and tempted his eye-love; he



could not mount the wide staircase where he had seen her on his marriage-day, her eyes flashing in triumph under her bridal-veil, that diamond ceinture round her waist that was now turned into gold at the Mont de Piété; he could not enter his home, so fair, so stately, with its wide windows opening on to the sloping lawns and sunny woods beyond, that were all, far as the eye could reach, his; the ghost of the Past—the Past which his own madness had made, and no power of his could now unmake—haunted and pursued him too bitterly! Still less could he have entered his mother's room, undisturbed by his order from the day she died; the chamber sacred to the memory of one who had loved him with so rare, so self-denying, so infinitely patient, unwearying, and tender a devotion; the mother whom the fruit of his own headlong madness had slain from the very depth and strength of her love for her wayward and idolized son.

How fair Vigne looked that day, with the sunlight of the budding summer on its white terraces and green woodlands, all around silent and hushed, save the murmur of the leaves and the soft rush of the river, and the distant belling of the deer that came on the warm, hushed air! It was a strangely sad and silent return—a return for twenty-four hours!—to his noble ancestral home after an absence of eleven years. It was not so that the lords of Vigne in by-gone time came back to their stately manor after fighting a good fight at Acre or Antioch, Worcester or Edgehill, Blenheim or Ramillies. Alone he turned slowly from the house and walked across the park, leaving the grand old pile behind him standing on its knoll of velvet turf, with its famous elms closing around it, and waving their green tree-tops up to the blue clear heavens above—a home worthy of a royal line, forsaken by its master, and left to hirelings and servants in all its fair and stately

beauty—with its legends of honor, and its memories of glory and of greatness. He left the house and walked across the park alone, save an old staghound, well-nigh blind, who had leaped upon him at the first sound of his step, and who now followed him with measured tread across the soft-yielding grass, and under the checkered shade that the great forest-trees of Vigne flung across his path. He walked across the stretching sunlit park, where he had passed so many happy hours as a boy, riding, shooting, fishing, lying under the elm-boughs in the dreamy beauty of such another summer day as this, thinking to himself what a brilliant, glorious, shadowless thing he, De Vigne of Vigne, would make of life when he should grow to man's estate. He walked along, strange commingling thoughts rushing through his brain of his mother, of Constance Trefusis, of Alma Tressillian, of his life, so full as it had been of adventure and excitement, revelry and sport, daring and pleasure—his life so brilliant before that one fatal mistake which marred and darkened it, which now but for that one error would have been so cloudless, crowned as it was with the strong, deep love of manhood, and the passionate devotion, the unswerving fidelity of such a heart as few men win to beat response to theirs. There rose before him the two women who had had so much influence upon his life: the one coarse, insolent, lost to shame, to mercy, and to decency, who had tempted with fifty devils' force in the dark gloom of the Royal Forest, goading him with insult, twitting him with brutal jeer, and luring him to murder; the other delicate, refined, loving, impassioned, with not a thought he might not read in her clear eyes, not a throb of her young heart that did not beat for him, leading him with her soft voice, and her noble trust, and her unselfish love to a higher, fairer, purer life, teaching him faith in human nature. They rose be-

fore him as he walked along, cutting the ferns and grasses as he passed, thought, and memory, and passion all at work, his nature as fiery, restless, wayward, impassioned, as when, years before, under the elms of Vigne, he had wooed the milliner of Frestonhills, the scrub and protégée of old Fantyre. He walked on under the great trees that had watched over his race for centuries, bitter thoughts rising in him at every step, and stung to keener pain rather than softened at the knowledge of the warm, loving heart that was so wholly his, and would be his, let him try it how he might, or ask what sacrifice he would; walked on until he came to the low ivy-clad fence which parted the churchyard from the park of Vigne, and there, under the great waving elm-trees, tossing their boughs in the summer air, with the lilies and the purple violets clustering round its pure white stone, he saw his mother's grave, the simple headstone bearing her name, lying in the soft summer sunshine, with the birds singing sweet low requiems around, and the church bells swinging slowly through the air, and the great elm-boughs sighing a Miserere for her whose life had been pure as the lilies, and sweet and humble as the violets that clustered round her tomb. And here even the living were forgotten in the memory of the dead, and De Vigne threw himself down beside the grave, calling on her name, as though his voice must waken the woman who had loved his slightest whisper, and never been deaf to any prayer of his. All the love he had borne his mother, all the love she had borne him, rushed upon his mind with an anguish of regret; if he had listened to her counsel, ever gentle, never ill-timed or unwise, she might have been now living, and the curse of his marriage would not have been on his life, nor its stain upon his name.

If—ah, *if*! How much of our life hinges upon *if*! She

had been very dear to him. The sound of her voice, the tenderness of her smile—the voice that had never spoken harshly to him, that smile that had never failed to welcome him; her gentle nature that his wayward will so often had tried; her unwearying affection, which would so fain have guarded him from every adverse fate; all that had made his mother beloved and reverent and precious to him; all that had made her words have weight with him in his high-spirited, dauntless, self-willed boyhood, when he would listen to no other; all that had made her death a remorse and a regret that a lifetime would not efface—came back upon him in a flood of memories, as he saw the summer sunlight glistening on her grave, and felt the bitterness, the sharpness, the keen, lasting, cruel sorrow of that mystery of Death which wrenches a human life so strangely from those who would so fain hold it back from that dark and ruthless tomb, where no regret, however bitter, can follow to atone for wrong, and no voice, however loved, can hope to waken a response.

The sunshine streamed around him, playing fitfully on the marble as it fell on it through the parted foliage of the overhanging elms. The violets and the lilies of the valley filled the air with their fragrance; the chimes tolled out slowly from the old church tower; all was silent around him, save the carols of the birds and the myriad nameless hushed murmurs and whispers that stir the solitude of a summer's day, with the low and solemn voices of the earth. In the stillness—where no human eyes looked on him—he lay there on the green sods, with the bitterness of a yearning and futile remorse heavy upon him, as he remembered the words of her prophecy, "You will love again, to find the crowning sorrow of your life, or drag another in to share your curse!"

And like the cut of a lancet on fresh-opened wounds fell words spoken beside him :

"You are thinking, Major, of what a mistake you made eleven years ago, and what a fortune you would give to be able to undo it!"

Such an intruder in such a place—coarse insult by his mother's grave—he, who held his dearest friends at a distance from his deeper feelings, to be broken in upon thus rudely by such an intruder! He started up, and swung round to meet his ex-valet, Raymond. A deep flush of anger rose over his face; the man quailed before the fire that flashed from his eyes, and the chill and bitter fury with which his features seemed to change into the set coldness of stone, as he motioned him away, too low and too contemptible a foe to honor by laying his hand upon him.

"Begone, or your insolence will cost you dear. How dare you, you bound, come before me again."

"Hound! Humph! Wasn't it true what I said, Major?" asked Raymond, with a smile. "Wouldn't you give a good deal to anybody who made a free man of you again?"

Without stopping for a minute to consider what might be the import of his words; stung past endurance by the impudent leer with which the man dared to address him, De Vigne, ever quick to make his muscle do battle for him, and apt to revenge insults as his ancestors had used to do in ages less polite and—perhaps—less cowardly, seized Raymond by his coat-collar—the man's presence was sacrilege beside his mother's grave—lifted him up, and flung him across the fence on to the grass and ferns and wild thyme of the churchyard beyond.

"Learn how I bear insult from curs like you! A month at the treadmill will do you good."

"Bien obligé, monsieur," muttered Raymond, as he

gathered himself slowly up from his turfy bed. "Your grasp is no child's play, Major! But listen one moment, sir; do listen. I mean you no insult, by Heaven I don't! I ask, because I can tell you what may be of great importance. If I could make your wife *not* your wife, would you listen to me then, sir?"

Like lightning the blood leapt through his veins at the words "your wife not your wife." The simple thought put suddenly before him brought with it too strong a rush of possible joy, too delicious a vision of what *might be*, for him to hear it calmly or retain his self-possession and reserve!"

"Not my wife!" he muttered, his voice hoarse and stifled in its agony of suspense. "Good God! Have you warrant for what you say?"

"Full warrant, Major. I can do for you what no divorce laws can, thanks to the timorous fools that frame them. If those gentlemen were all fettered themselves, they'd make the gate go a little easier to open. I *can* set you free, but how I won't tell you till we come a little to terms."

Free! Not to Bonnevard, pining in the darkness and wretchedness of Chillon, did freedom, even in its simplest suggestion, bring such a flood of delirious joy as it brought to him. Free! Great Heaven! the very thought maddened him with eager, impatient, breathless thirst for *certainly*, mingled with the cold, chill, horrible doubt that the man was cheating, misleading, and deceiving him. He sprang over the fence to his side, and seized him in a grasp that he would have vainly striven to shake off.

"Great Heaven! If you have truth in what you say, tell me all—all—at once; do you hear?—all!"

"Gently, gently, Major," said Raymond, wincing under the grasp that held him as firmly as an iron vice, "or I

shall have no breath to tell you anything. I can set you free, sir; and I don't wonder you wish to be rid of her! But before I tell you how, you must tell me if you will give me the proper price for information."

De Vigne shook him like a little dog.

"Scoundrel! Do you think I will make a compact with such as you? Out with all you know, and I will reward you for it afterward; out with it, or if it be a hoax it will be the worse for you!"

"But, Major," persisted the man, halting for breath, "if I tell you all first, what gage have I that you will not act on my information, and never give me a farthing?"

"My word!" gasped De Vigne, hurling the answer down his throat. "Do you think me such another scoundrel as yourself? Speak; do you hear? Is she not my wife?"

"No, Major; because she was mine first!"

"*Yours?* Then——"

"Your marriage is null and void, sir."

De Vigne staggered against the fence, dizzy and blind with the delirium of his sudden liberty, the unloosing of those cruel fetters fastened on him by Church and Law, which had clung to him, festering to his very bone, and bowing him down with their unbearable weight. Free! from the curse that had so long pursued him; free from that hateful tie that had so long made life loathsome to him; free from that she-devil who so long had made him shun all of her sex, as men shun poisons they have once imbibed to the ruin of health and strength! Free, his name once more his own, purified from the taint of her claim upon it; free!—his home once more his own, purged from the dark and haunting memories of an irremediable past; free from the bitterness of his own folly, so long repented of in agony and solitude; free to cast from him by law, as he had long done from heart and mind, the woman

whom he loathed and hated; free to recompense with honor in the sight of men the strong and faithful love which would have given up all for his sake, and followed him whithersoever he should choose to lead, content if she were by his side to go with him to any fate.

Dizzy and blind and breathless with the strength of the new-born hope, he staggered against the gray and ivy-tangled wall of the church, and forgetful of Raymond's presence, seeing, hearing, heeding nothing, save that one word—free! the blood flowing with fever-heat through all his veins, every nerve in his body throbbing and thrilling with the electric shock.

He covered his eyes with his hand, like a man dazzled with the sudden radiance of a noontide sun. Then he grasped Raymond's arm again.

"Will you swear that?"

"Yes, sir, on the Bible, and before all the courts and judges in the land, if you like."

De Vigne gave one quick, deep sigh, flinging off from him forever the iron burden of many years.

"Tell me all, then, quick, from beginning to end, and give me all your proofs."

He spoke with all the eager, wayward, restless impatience of his boyhood; the old light gleamed in his eyes, the old music rang in his voice. The chains were struck off; he was free!

"Very well, sir. I must go back a good many years, and make a long story of it. Nineteen years ago—'tisn't pleasant to look back so long, sir—Lucy Davis, the handsome milliner of Frestonhills, was a very dashing-looking girl—as you thought, Major, at that time—and I was twenty-two, always weak where women were concerned, and much more easily taken in than I was when I had seen a little more of human nature. My name was Trefusis,



sir, not Raymond at all. I took an *alias* when I entered your service. My father was a Newmarket leg, and he made a good pot of money one way and another; and he had more gentlemen in his power, and more of your peerage swells, sir, under his dirty old thumb, knowing all that he knew, and having done for 'em all that he had done, than you'd believe if I was to swear it to you. He wanted to make a gentleman of me. 'Charlie, my boy,' he used to say, 'with brains and tin you may be as good as them swells any day; they hain't no sort of business to look down on you. I've done dirty work enough to serve them, I reckon.' He wanted to make a gentleman of me, and he gave me a capital education, and more money and fine clothes than any boy in the school. But what's bred in the bone, sir, will come out in the flesh. He went to glory when I was about eighteen, sir, leaving me all his tin to do just whatever I liked with it, and not a soul to say me nay. I soon spent it, sir; every stiver was gone in no time. I bought horses, and jewelry, and wine. I betted, I played; in short, I made ducks and drakes with it in a very few years with a lot of idle young dogs like myself; for though the money would have bought me a very good business, or kept me straight if I'd lived closely and quietly, it wasn't enough to dash with as if I'd had a fortune at my fingers' ends, like yours, sir. But I was a weak young fool in those days, especially weak about women; a handsome woman might turn me round her finger just however she chose, and I'd no strength whatever against her. High and low, Major, men are all alike for the beaux yeux. Jimmy Jarvis—you will have heard of him, sir?—Jimmy was going to have a mill with the Brownlow Boy, at Graystone Green, (perhaps you remember that's only two miles out of Frestonhills,) and I went down with two or three others to see the fight. While I was in Frestonhills, sir,

I saw Lucy Davis in the milliner's shop in High Street, and I fell straight in love with her for her great black eyes and her bright carnation color. I thought I'd never seen anything half so handsome in all my days; and she was a magnificent girl at that time, sir—magnificent without a doubt. If she'd been a duchess's daughter people would have made a fine row about her. I went to church to see her the next day, and bowed to her coming out; and so we got acquainted, sir, and I fell more and more in love, and I wouldn't have stirred from Frestonhills just then to have made my fortune. That was a year after you had left, sir. But I knew nothing about *your* affair, sir, then—trust her!"

(Oh! for the woods of Vigne to hear a valet talk as rival to their lord. Yet in the olden times, in their hot youth and their inflammable passions, I dare say those haughty gentlemen had whispered love-vows to their mothers' fair-faced handmaidens, and looked into the soft brown eyes of Sybil, the forest-ranger's daughter, under the cool shadows of those very elms, long midsummers before; for a young man's taste is easily pleased, and, in youth, we ask no more than the bloom on the lip and the tint on the cheek.)

"I was in love with her; I made myself out a gentleman; I talked grand of marble halls and gorgeous doings, like Claude Melnotte; I bought her presents fit for a countess; I set all my wits to work to win her, and she was a very hard-mouthed, touchy young filly at that time, sir, with a very careful eye to her own interests, and very sure not to do anything till she thought it was for her own advantage. At seventeen, sir, Lucy was a shrewd, calculating, hard-hearted woman of the world, an intrigante to do young fellows by the dozen. Half the women that go to the bad, sir, do it because bad is their bias—

because they like vice better than virtue, find it more lucrative, and it pleases their vanity or their avarice. *Love* has very little to do with it, sir; there are bad women as well as bad men, I take it, though the papers and the preachers do term them all innocent angels! Well! I was in love with Lucy, and she thought me a man of fashion and of fortune, and married me; the register is in the church of Frestonhills; you can see it, sir, any day you like. In six months I thought myself a very great fool for having fettered myself—most people think so, sir, some time or other, poor folks even more than rich. Lucy's temper was that of a devil—always had been—and when she found out that all my riches would very soon make themselves wings and flee away, you may suppose it was not softened very much. She helped me to spend my money, sir, for twelve months, leading me about as wretched a life as any woman could lead a man. We lived chiefly abroad, sir, in Paris, and at the German Baths; then the tin was all gone, and Lucy grew a very virago, and, as she had taken me only out of ambition, it was a hard cut to her, I dare say, to find me a mere nobody, with nothing at all to speak of in the way of money, much less of rank. She led me a shocking life, sir. We parted by mutual consent; we could not get on at all, and we hated each other cordially. I left her at Wiesbaden, and went my own ways; she had spent every shilling I had. Some time after, I was fool enough to forge a check; it was found out, and they shipped me off to the colonies, and Lucy was free of me. Some years after, I learnt what she did with herself; at Wiesbaden old Lady Fantyre was staying, roning, gambling, and living by her wits, as you know she always has done, sir, ever since anybody can remember her. She saw Lucy at the Kursaal, and Lucy had improved wonderfully in twelve months: she could get up a smattering of things very fast; she could

dress well on little or nothing; she had quick wits, and a haughty, defiant, knock-me-down manner that concealed all her ignorance, and carried everything before her. Old Fantyre took a fancy to her; she wanted to have a companion, somebody to make her up well for the evenings, and read her dirty novels to her, and humor her caprices, and amuse the young fellows at her little card-parties while she fleeced them at *écarté* or *vingt-et-un*. Lucy seemed just fit for her place. She didn't know she was married; Lucy made herself out an innocent, unprotected girl, whom you, sir, had deserted in an abominable way, and old Fantyre took her into her service. She thought Lucy's handsome black eyes would draw plenty of greenhorns to her supper-table and her cards, and you know, sir, the cards have always been the old lady's bankers, and very good ones, too, or I mistake. Now, Lucy was an uncommonly clever girl, hard-hearted and sharp-sighted; she humored the old woman, she made herself necessary to her, she chimed in with all her sayings, she listened to all her stories, she got into her good graces, and made her do pretty well what she chose. You remember, sir, perhaps, that when you and Lucy parted at Frestonhills she told you she'd be revenged on you. She isn't a woman to *forget*; if a cat scratched her, and she met that cat again ten years afterward, she'd recognize it, and punish it. She'd kept you steadily in her mind, and meant to pay you off for it one fine day, whenever occasion served. She'd set her heart on punishing you the bitterest way she could, and thought, and planned, and schemed till she'd got it all complete. She told Lady Fantyre about you, and she induced her to think that if she could catch you and marry you, what a capital thing it would be for both of them, and how royally they could help you to spend your fortune.

"I must tell you, Lucy had heard that the government

ship that had taken me out to Botany Bay had foundered, and she didn't know that I and a few others had managed to drift in the jolly-boat till an American cruiser picked us up. She thought I was drowned, or else she would have been a vast lot too wide awake to go in for bigamy. Old Fantyre listened, agreed, and took her to England, and introduced her as her niece. There, as you know, sir, you met her, and fell into her toils again. I don't wonder you did not know her; I never should. Years and society and dress, and the education she'd given herself, made such a difference. And how should you think of Lady Fantyre's niece being the same with the milliner girl of Frestonhills High Street? And she was far handsomer then than she had been at sixteen. She caught you, sir—you know how better than I; and at the church her devilish nature came out, and she took the worst revenge she could on you, by proclaiming who she was before all your friends. She knew if you'd only found it out afterward, you'd have hidden it in your own heart; the world would have been none the wiser, and she'd have been cheated of half her revenge. Four years after you had married her, I came to Europe. I'd been staying in the United States, till I thought all fear of my being recognized for that by-gone little affair had blown over; and I went as valet to the Duc de Vermuth. I often wondered what had become of my wife; till one Sunday, when I went to the Pré Catalan, I saw a lady in a carriage, talking and laughing with a number of young fellows round her. She was a remarkably fine-looking woman, and something in her face struck me as like my wife. At that minute she saw me. She turned as white as her rouge would let her, gave a sort of scream, and stared at me. Perhaps she thought she saw my ghost. At any rate, she pulled the check-string, and drove away from me as fast as she could, whether I was in the spirit or

the flesh. Of course I didn't let her give me the slip like that. I followed her to a dashing hotel in the Champs Elysées, and just as she stepped on the pavé, after her grand green and gold chasseur, I stepped up to her and just said, 'Well, old girl, how are you?' Horrible she looked—as if she longed to kill me—and, indeed, I dare say she did. She signed me to silence, and said, 'Not now; come at eight this evening.' I went; and she told me all her story, and offered me, if I would keep quiet and tell nobody she was my wife, to go shares with me in the money you allowed her provided she lived out of England. I thought about it a little. I saw I should get nothing by proclaiming our marriage. I closed with her, and I lived at my ease. But she grew screwy; she didn't pay up to time. She used to anticipate the money, and then defraud me of my share. At last it came into my head, when I heard you had come back from India, to see what sort of gentleman you were, and whether you wanted your freedom bad enough to pay me a high price for it. You required a valet. I entered your service; and when I was sent down to Richmond with the parrot and the books and the flowers, and so on, for that little lady—no, Major, don't stop me, I mean no offense to her, and I must bring her name in to make my story clear—I thought the time would soon come, sir, when you'd give *any* price for your freedom, for I heard plenty of talk, sir, at that time, about you and her; servants trouble themselves more about their master's business than they do about their own. The day you dismissed me from your service, I was going to tell you, if you had only listened. But you were so impatient and so haughty, that I thought I'd let you go on in ignorance, and free yourself, if ever you wanted, as best you might. I entered Lord Vane Castleton's service then. You know he hated you bitterly, because he was gone quite mad about Miss

Tressillian; had set his heart upon her, just because he thought she belonged to you and was not to be had. It seems, sir, he had been very good friends with Lucy in Paris, and he wrote and told her you were in love again, and with somebody who, he thought, didn't know you were married, and that if she wished to put a stop to it, she should come over and tell Miss Alma. Over she did come, saw him first, and then went to St. Crucis; and after she'd been—I didn't see her, and didn't know she was in London—he sent me to bring Miss Tressillian to Windsor, while you were sitting in court-martial on Mr. Halkett. It was a dirty job, sir, I know, and a rascally one. Don't look at me so fiercely, Major, for God's sake. I am sorry I did it now, for she'd sweet blue eyes, that little lady, and I was never quite easy till I knew she'd got out of Lord Vane's clutches; she must have done it by some miracle, for no other woman ever got away from him before. Then you went to the Crimea, and Lucy paid worse and worse; to be sure, she gave me that diamond ceinture she wore on her wedding-day, your present to her, sir, I think, and it was good for 1000*l.*, but they wouldn't give me so much at the Mont de Piété, and I owed more than half what they did give me. At last I thought I would try you again, if only to spite Lucy, who was living in splendor and grudging me every shilling. I wrote to you at the Crimea—I called to speak to you at Mivart's—finally, I tracked you here. Now I've told you all my tale, Major. I know you well enough to know your word is as sure a bond as another man's check; and if you'll go with me, sir, to Trinity Church, Frestonhills, I'll show you the register of my marriage, sir, which makes yours null and void."

De Vigne leant against the old gray stone; his face was white with the intensity of the sudden joy, his breathing came short and thick, his eyes were dark as night, with the

rapture thrilling through every nerve, till it seemed to stifle him in its intensity; his strong frame trembled like a woman's. The ecstasy of that hour! No criminal, condemned to death and suddenly reprieved, felt the warm rush of fresh air welcoming him as he issued—a free man—from the darkness of his prison-cell of doom, with deeper, more bewildering joy, than he realized and welcomed his liberty from the festering and bitter chains that so long had dragged upon him—his liberty from the weary weight, the repented folly, the bitter curse of an Early Marriage.

He was silent, breathing fast and loud, struggling to realize this possibility of freedom. Then—he threw back his head with a proud joyous gesture; he looked up to the glad summer sun shining above his head; he drew in with a deep long breath the free sweet air that streamed around him. He turned his eyes upon the man, flashing with their old, proud, brilliant, shadowless light.

“Right! I would pay *any* price for freedom. Let us go at once. I will not lose an hour—a moment!”

He went—and the sunlight played over his mother's grave, seeming to linger fondly there, touching the fragrant violets to a deeper blue and the lilies to a purer silver. It was pitiful that the gentle and loving heart, stilled there forever, could not awake to throb in unison with her son's joy, and know his freedom from that deadly curse whose blow had sent her to her tomb! Her love had been with him in his grief; it was cruel that her love could not be with him in his joy. Cruel? ah, truly!—on earth there is no more bitter thing than the death that is in the midst of life.

\* \* \* \* \*

Frestonhills, unchanged, lay nestling among the green pastures and fresh woods of Berkshire, and all the old familiar places struck strangely on him as he passed them.



There flowed the silver Kennet, bright and rapid as of old, rushing on its swift sunny way under the graceful bridges, and past the wild luxuriant hedges, and through the quiet, silent country towns and villages. There, on its banks, were schoolboys lying among the purple clover and under the fragrant hawthorns, as poor little Curly had done long years ago. There were the dark palings, and the great forest-trees of the park of Weivehurst, long changed to other hands before its rightful owner was laid to rest, his grave marked only by a simple wooden cross, under the southern skies of Lorave. There, against the blue heavens, rose above its woods the gray pinnacles of the old house where Alma Tressillian had made the roof ring with her childish laughter, playing on the dark galleries, or out under the golden laburnums that flung the same shadows on the lawn, now, as then. There was the old Chancery, its gable roofs and its low ivy-grown walls, as he passed. A lady glanced up, gardening among her geraniums and heliotropes—it was Miss Arabella—the ringlets very gray now. A little farther on, in the old playing-field, there were the wickets, and the bats, and the jumping poles, and four or five boys, in their shirt sleeves and their straw hats, enjoying their half-holiday, as we had done before them. So life goes on; when one is bowled out, another is ready to step into his shoes, and, no matter how many the ball of death may knock over, the cricket of life is kept up the same, and players are never wanting.

The register lay on the table under the arched Norman window of the vestry of the church where, twenty years before, we had fidgeted through the dreary periods of the rector's cruel sermon full an hour long, and cast glances over our hymn-books at the pastrycook's pretty daughters.

The great old register, ponderous and dusty, lay on the

table, the sunbeams from the stained glass above falling on its leather binding, and its thickly-written leaves, full of so many records of man's joy and sorrow, crowded with so many names that now were empty sounds, penned by so many hands that were now crumbled to dust under the churchyard sods near by. The great register lay on its table in the dark, quiet, solitary vestry—the last he had seen was the one in which he had signed his doom, eleven years before, in the church at Vigne. The old sexton unlocked the book, and with shaking infirm hand turned over the leaves one after the other. De Vigne leant against the table, watching for the entry, his breath short and labored, his pulse beating with fever-heat, a mist before his eyes, a great agony of dread—the dread of *deception*—tightening his heart and oppressing him to suffocation. If the man's story were not true!—if this, too, were a hoax and a fraud! Breathless, trembling in every limb with fear and hope, he bent over the book, pushing the old man's hand away; his agony of impatience could not brook the slow and awkward fumbling of leaf after leaf—by the palsied feebleness of age. He thrust the pages back one after another till he reached the year 18—. Entry after entry met his eye: from lords of the manor, their ancestral names dashed across the page; from poor peasants, who could only make their mark; from feminine signatures, trembling and illegible, marriage after marriage met his eager glance, but not yet the one which was to loosen his fetters and set him free. He turned the leaves over one after the other, his heart throbbing thick with wild hope and irrepressible fear. At last the setting sun, shining in through the rich hues of glory, the rubies and the ambers, the heads of saints, and the golden scrolls, and the blazoned shields on the stained window above his head, flung radiant colors on one dim yellow sheet, illumining with its aureole of light

the two signatures he sought—the words that gave him ransom—the names that struck off his chains—

CHARLES TREFUSIS.

CONSTANCE LUCY DAVIS.

And as his eyes fell upon the page that freed him from the wife that had so long cursed his life, and stained his honor, and made his name abhorrent in his sight, because she bore it, De Vigne staggered forward, and, flinging the casement open, leant out into the calm, fresh evening, stunned by his sudden deliverance as by some mortal blow, and gasping for breath, while the warm westerly wind swept over him, like a man who has escaped from the lurid heat and stifling agony of fire into the pure, sweet air of a breaking dawn.

He was FREE! The life that he had so madly sought to spend like water, and fling off from him as an evil too bitter to be borne, among jungles of Scinde and on the steppes of the Crimea, was once more rich, and precious, and beloved;—he learned at last what his wayward nature had been long ere it would believe, that the fate we deem a curse is oftentimes an angel in disguise, if we wait patiently for the unfolding of its wings from the darkness that enshrouds them.

## PART THE TWENTY-NINTH.

## I.

## VALETE.

Two days after there was a fête given at Enghein, at the princely maison de plaisance of an English earl—a stout, bloated old man, lavish as the wind, and rich as a Russian, who, consequently, had all the most seductive Parisiennes to make love to him; Dalilah caring very little who her Samson be, provided she can cut off his locks to her own advantage. The fête was of unusual magnificence, and the empress of it was “the Trefusis,” as we call her, “that poor fellow De Vigne’s wife—a very fast lot, too,” as men in general called her—“Ma Reine,” as the Earl of Morehampton called her, in that pleasant familiarity which the lady in question ever readily admitted to those good friends of hers, who emptied half the Palais Royal upon her in bijouterie, jewelry, and other innocent gifts of amity—a familiarity that always stopped *just* short of Sir Cresswell’s court, over the water. The Trefusis reigned at Enghein, and remarkably well she looked in her sovereignty, her jeweled ivory parasol handle for her scepter, and her handsome eyes for her droit de conquête. Only three nights before she had lain on the dank grass in the Royal Forest, where the mad agony of a man, whom she had goaded and taunted to the verge of the darkest and most hideous guilt that can stain a human soul, had flung her off, bidding her thank God, not him, he had not murdered her in that ghastly temptation; hurling her from him in delirious violence, lest in another

moment of that fell struggle crime should stain his life, and his grip should be upon her throat—her death lie at his door—her blood be red upon his hand! Only three nights before! but to-day she sat under the limes at Enghein, the very memory of that hour cast behind her for evermore, save when she remembered how she had taunted, how she had jeered, how she had triumphed—remembered in gloating glee, for her victim could not escape her snare! The Trefusis had rarely looked better—never felt more secure in her completed vengeance upon De Vigne, her omnipotent sway over Morehampton, and all her lordly claque, than now. She was beautifully rouged, the carnation tint rich and soft, and defying all detection; her black Chantilly lace swept around her superb form; a parure of amethysts glittering in her bosom, haughtily defiant, magnificent, though coarse if you will, as she drove down to the villa in the Earl's carriage, and reigned under the limes in dominance and triumph that day, as she had reigned since the day she had first looked at her own face in the mirror, and sworn by that face to rise and to revenge.

In brilliant style Morehampton had prepared to receive her, for he admired the quasi-milliner of Frestonhills more than anything else, for the time being, to the extreme rage of La Baronne de Bréloques, Mademoiselle Celeste Papillon of the Français, and many other fair Parisiennes. There was the villa itself, luxurious as Eugène Sue's; and there were grounds with alcoves, and statues, and rosieries à ravir, as Mademoiselle Celeste phrased it; there was a "pavillon des arts," where some of the best cantatrici in Paris sang like nightingales; there was a déjeuner, with the best cookery in France—who can say more? there were wines that would have made Rahab or Father Mathew swear, with Trimalchio, "*Vita vinum est*;" there

were plenty of men, lions, littérateurs, and milors Anglais, who were not bored here, because they could say and do just what they pleased, with no restraint upon them whatever. And there were plenty of women, (very handsome ones, too, for the Earl would never have wasted his invitations on plain faces,) who smoked, and laughed at grivoises tales, and smiled at very prononcée flattery, and drank the Johannisberg and the Steinberg very freely for such dainty lips, and imitated us with their tranchant manners, their slang, and their lionneism in many things, except their toilettes, which were exclusively feminine in their brilliance and voluminous extent—among them the Trefusis, reigning like an empress, to the dire annoyance of most of them, especially to Mademoiselle Papillon, who, being a very dashing young actress, accustomed to look upon Morehampton as her own especial spoil, did not relish being eclipsed by the Englishwoman's superb person and bold black eyes.

The déjeuner was over, during which the noble Earl, as his friends in the Upper House termed him when they were most politely damning him and his party, was exceedingly devoted to the Trefusis, and thought he had never seen anything finer than those admirably-tinted eyes and beautifully-colored cheeks. He did not care for your nymphs of eighteen, they were generally too shy and too thin for his taste; he liked bien conservé, full-blown, magnificent roses, like the ex-milliner, who certainly made herself more amiable to him than those who have only heard of her in the studio at St. Crucis and the Forest of Fontainebleau can well imagine. The déjeuner was over, at which the Trefusis had reigned with supreme contentment, laughed very loudly, and drank champagne enough for a young cornet just joined; at which old Fantyre enjoyed the pâtes de foie gras and other delicacies, like an old

gourmette as she was, told dirty stories in broad Irish-French, and chuckled in herself to see gouty old Morehampton playing the gallant; and at which Mademoiselle Papillon could have fainted with spite, but not willing to give the detested Englishwoman so enormous a triumph, resisted her feelings with noble heroism.

The déjeuner was over, and the guests had broken up into groups, dispersing themselves over the villa and its grounds. The Trefusis and Morehampton took themselves to the "pavillon des arts;" but, after hearing one song from the "Traviata," "Ma Reine" was bored—she cared nothing for music—and she threw herself down on a seat under some linden-trees to take ice, listen to his private band, which was playing close by, and flatter him about his new barouche, which she knew would be offered her as soon as she had praised it. It was by such gifts as these she managed to eke out her income, and live au premier in the Champs Elysées. Morehampton flung himself on the grass at her feet, forgetful of gout and lumbago; other men gathered round her; she was a "deuced fine woman," they thought, but, "by George! they didn't envy De Vigne." The band played walses and Béranger airs; the Earl was diverted between admiration of the black eyes above and rueful recollections of the damp turf beneath him; Mademoiselle Papillon made desperate love to Leslie Egerton, of the Queen's Bays, but never missed a word or a glance that went on under the lime-trees for all that, with that peculiar double set of optics and oral nerves with which women seem gifted. Very brilliant, and pleasant, and lively, and Watteau-like it all was; and, standing under an alcove at some little distance, mingling unnoticed with the crowd of domestics, stood Raymond, *alias* Charles Trefusis, come to claim his wife, as he had been bound by De Vigne to do on receipt of De Vigne's

reward—none the less weighty a one, you may be sure, because the man had been given only a promise, and not a bond. De Vigne's honor in those matters was in exact inverse ratio to the world's.

"By Jove! sir," the fellow whispered to me—I had come with him to see he kept good faith, and did not give us the slip—"just look at her, what a dash she cuts, and what a fool she's making of that old lord! That's Lord Morehampton, ain't it, sir? I think I remember him dining once with Lord Vane in Pall Mall. He's a regular martyr to the gout. I wonder he likes that damp grass. I suppose Lucy's bewitched him. Isn't she a wonderful woman, sir! Who'd think, to see her now, that she was ever the daughter of a beggar-woman, and a little milliner-girl at Frestonhills, making bonnets and dresses for parsons' wives!"

I looked at her as he spoke, and, though it seemed wonderful to him, it did not seem wonderful to me. Lucy Davis's rise was such a rise as Lucy Davis was certain to make, favored by opportunity as she had been—neither more nor less of a rise than a hard-headed, unscrupulous, excessively handsome woman, determined to push her way, and able to take the best possible advantage of every turn of the wheel, was pretty sure to effect. She could not make herself a gentlewoman—she could not make herself a woman of talent or of ton. That she was not a "lady," Sabretasche's sure perception had told him long, long ago, and his daughter's delicate taste had known still more certainly later on: she was merely what she had been for the last ten years, with the aid of money, dress, and assurance—a dashing, handsome, skillful intrigante, whose magnificence of form made men forget or never notice her shortcomings in style, and whose full-blown beauty made them content with the paucity of ideas and the vulgar harshness



of tone in the few words which ever passed the Trefusis's lips, which were too wise to essay often that sure touchstone of mind and education—conversation.

Raymond stood looking at her, a cunning, malicious gleam of satisfaction in his little light eyes. His wife had made a better thing of life than he had done; he detested her accordingly; he had many old grudges to pay off against her for bitter, snarling words, and money flung to him, because she feared him, with a sneer and an invective; he hated her for having lived in clover, while he had not even had a taste of luxury, save the luxuries of flunkeyism and valetdom, since they parted, and he enjoyed pulling her up in the midst of her glories with such malignant pleasure as was natural to his disposition. She had married him at two-and-twenty; she had made him repent of it before the honeymoon was out; she had played her cards since to her own glorification and his mortification: there was plenty in all that to give him no little enjoyment in throwing her back, with a jerk, in the midst of her race. He stood looking at her with a peculiar smile on his lips. I dare say he was thinking what a fool he had been to fall in love with the black-eyed milliner of Frestonhills, and what a far greater fool still was his lordship of Morehampton to waste so much time and so much money, such wines, such jewelry, and such adoration, on this full-blown rose, whom no one ever tried to gather but, somewhere or other, they scratched themselves on her dextrously moss-hidden thorns.

At last the Trefusis, tired of ices, cancons, and Morehampton's florid compliments, which I should think must have been most profoundly tiresome, (though all flattery is welcome to some women, as all bonbons to children, whether of sugar or chalk, lemon-juice or citric acid,) rose to go into the house and look at some rare Du Berri vases

that had belonged to Madame de Parabère, and for which the Earl had given a fabulous price, and as foolish a one as our ancestors used to give for tulip-roots. The Trefusis rose, Morehampton sprung to his feet with boyish lightness and gallant disregard of the gout, and then her husband stepped forward; and I doubt if Nemesis, though she often took a more imposing, ever assumed a deadlier guise than that of the *ci-devant* valet!

The Trefusis gave an irrepressible start as she saw him; the color left her lips—her cheeks it could not leave. She began laughing and talking to Morehampton hurriedly, nervously, incoherently, but there was a wild, lurid gleam in her eye, restless and savage. Her husband touched his hat submissively, but with a queer smile still on his face.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but may I be allowed to relieve you of the escort of my wife?"

Morehampton twisted himself round, stuck his gold glass in his eye, and stared with all his might; the men crowded closer, stroking their moustaches in curiosity and surprise; the English women, who could understand the speech, suspended the spoonfuls of ice that were en route to their lips, and broke off their conversation for a minute; the Trefusis flushed scarlet to her very brow, her eyes scintillated and glared like a tigress just stung by a shot that inflames all her savage nature into fury—ever ready with a lie, she clung to Morehampton's arm:

"My dear lord! I know this poor creature very well; he is a lunatic—a confirmed lunatic—a harmless one quite; but it is one of his hallucinations that every woman he sees and admires is his wife, who really, I believe, ran away from him, and his brain was turned with the shock of her infidelity. He is harmless, as I say—at least I have always heard so—but pray tell your servants to take him away. It is very horrible!"

It was an admirably-told falsehood—told, too, with the most natural ease, the most natural compassion imaginable—and passed muster with Morehampton, who signed to two of his lacqueys.

“Seize that fellow and turn him out of the grounds. How did he get in, Soames? Go for some gendarmes if he resist you,” said the Earl, aloud; then bent his head, and added, (*sotto voce*), “How grieved I am, dearest, that you should be so absurdly annoyed. What a shockingly stupid fellow! Brain turned, you say—and for a *wife*?”

But Raymond signed off the two footmen, who were circling gingerly round him like two dogs round a hedgehog, not admiring their task, having a genuine horror of lunacy, and being enervated, probably, by the epicureanisms of plush-existence.

“That is a pretty story, my lord, only, unfortunately, it isn’t true. Ben travato—but all a humbug! I am as sane as anybody here; much too sane to have my brain turned because my wife ran away from me. Most men would thank their stars for such a kind deliverance! I am come to claim mine, though, for a little business there is to be done, and she is on your arm now, my lord. She married me nineteen years ago, and made me repent of it before a month was out.”

“Dear, dear! how absurd, and yet how shocking! Pray send him away,” whispered the Trefusia, clinging to the Earl’s arm, looking, it must be confessed, more like a devil than a divinity, for her lips were white and twitching savagely, and the spots of rouge glared scarlet.

“Do you hear me, fellows? Turn that impudent rascal out!” swore Morehampton.

“That fellow’s wife! Why, she’s De Vigne’s wife. Everybody knows that!” muttered Leslie Egerton, sticking his glass in his eye. “Saw him married myself, poor wretch!”

"Mais qu'est ce que c'est donc?" asked Mademoiselle Papillon, edging herself in with a dim delicious idea that it was something detrimental to her rival.

"Kick him out!" "Turn him out!" "An escaped lunatic!" "Impertinent rascal!" "Ma foi! qu'a-t-il donc!" "Mais comme c'est extraordinaire!" "Dieu! qu'est ce que cela veut dire!" resounded on all sides from Morehampton's guests, and the Trefusis's adorers.

"Major De Vigne's wife?" repeated Raymond. "No, she's not, gentlemen; he knows it now, too, and thanks Heaven for it. She married me, as I say, nineteen years ago; more fool I to let her. Ten years ago she married Major De Vigne. So you see, my lord, she's my wife, not his, and I believe what she has done is given a nasty, coarse, impolite term by law. What I tell you is quite true. Here's Captain Chevasney, my lord, who will tell you the same, and tell it better than I. Come, old girl, you've had a long holiday; you must come with me and work for a little while now."

He spoke with a diabolical grin, and, thus appealed to, I went forward and gave Morehampton as succinctly as I could the outlines of the story. The Trefusis's face grew gray as ashes, save where the rouge remained in two bright crimson spots fixed and unchanged, her eyes glittered in tiger-like fury, in cold, hellish wrath, and her parasol fell to the ground; its ivory handle snapped in two as her hands clinched upon it, only with a violent effort restraining herself from flying at mine or her husband's throat. For the first time in her life, the clever Greek had her own marked card turned against her; her schemes of malice, of vengeance, of ambition, were all swept away like cobwebs, never to be gathered up again. De Vigne was free, and she was caught in her own toils!

She swung round, sweeping her black Chantilly lace

round her, and scattering her sandal-wood perfume on the air, laughing :

"And do you believe this cock-and-bull story, Lord Morehampton?" Her voice came out in a low, fierce hiss, like a serpent's, while her large, sensual, ruby lips curled and quivered with impotent rage. "Do you believe this valet's tale, bribed by a man who would move heaven and earth to prove his lawful marriage false, and the corroborating story told so glibly by a gentleman who, though he calls himself a man of honor, would swear black were white to pleasure his friend?"

"Come, come there, my lady!" laughed Raymond. "Wait a bit. Don't call us bad names. You can't ride the high horse any more like that, and if you don't take care what you say we'll have you up for libel; we will, I assure you. Come, you used to be wide awake once, and if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head it may be the worse for you."

"Lord Morehampton, will you endure this? I must appeal," began the Trefusis, turning again to that noble Earl, who, with his double eye-glass in his eye, and his under lip dropped in extreme astonishment, was too much amazed, and too much annoyed, at such an unseemly and untimely interruption to his morning fête to take any part in the proceedings whatever. He was a little shy of her, indeed, and kept edging back slowly and surely. She was trembling now from head to foot with rage at her defeat, terror for the consequences of the esclandre, mad wrath and hatred that her victim had slipped from her fetters and that De Vigne was free.

Her husband interrupted her with a coarse laugh, before she could finish.

"You appeal to your cavalier servente, madame? Oh! if my Lord Morehampton likes to keep you, I have no ob-

jection; it will take a good deal of trouble off my hands, and I only wish him joy of his bargain. And next time, Lucy, make sure your chickens are hatched before you count them!"

At so summary a proposition from a husband, the Earl involuntarily drew back, blank dismay visible on his purple and supine features. The offer alarmed him! The Trefusis was a deuced handsome woman, but she was a deuced expensive one too, thought he, and he hardly desired to be saddled with her pour toujours. Added to his other expenses, for a permanence, she would go very near to ruin him, not to mention tears, reproaches, and scenes from many other quarters; and "she is a very vixen of a temper!" reflected the earl, wisely, as he edged a little farther back, and left her standing alone—who is not alone in defeat?

The Trefusis looked round on everybody as they hung back from her, leaving a clear space about her, with a searching, defiant glance, her fierce, black eyes seeming to smite and wither all they lit on; great savage lines gathered round her mouth and down her brow, that was dark with mortification and impotent chained-up fury. She glanced around, her lips twitching like a snared animal's, her face ashy gray save where the crimson rouge burned in two oval patches, flaring there like streaks of flame, in hideous contrast to the deathly pallor of the rest. She was defeated, outdone, humiliated; the frauds and schemes of twenty years fruitless and unavailing in the end; her victim free, her enemies triumphant! She glared upon us all till the boldest women shrank away terrified, and the men shuddered as they thought what a fiend incarnate this their "belle femme" was! Then she gathered her rich lace around her. To do her justice, she was game to the last!

"Order my carriage!"

She was beaten, but she would not show it; and to her carriage she swept, her massive Chantilly gathered round her, her silks rustling, her perfume scenting the air, her demie traine brushing the lime-blossoms off the lawn, her step stately and measured, her head defiantly erect, leaving on the grass behind her the fragile ivory handle, symbol of her foiled vengeance and her impotent wrath—her dethroned sovereignty. There was a moment's silence as she swept across the lawn, her tall chasseur, in his dashing green and gold uniform, walking before her, her two footmen with their long white wands behind, and at her side, dogging her footsteps, with his sneer of retribution and his smile of vengeance, the valet who had claimed her as his wife. There was a moment's silence; then the tongues were loosened, and her friends, and her rivals, and her adorers spake.

"Gad!" quoth my Lord of Morehampton, "she looked quite ugly, 'pon my soul she did, with those great rouge spots on her cheeks. Curse it! how deuced shocking!"

"Mon Dieu, milor," sneered Mademoiselle Papillon, "je vous félicité sur votre nouvelle amie, peut-être vous voudriez avoir le plaisir de prendre la rôle du *troisième* mari!"

"Better go and be Queen of the Greeks—deuced sharp woman!" said Lee Philipps.

"Always said that creature was the very devil. Plucky enough, though!" remarked Leslie Egerton, with his cigarette in his teeth. "What a jolly thing for De Vigne! Prime, ain't it?"

"The biter bit!" chuckled old Fantyre. "Well she was very useful to me, but she was always a devil, as you say, Leslie; horrid temper! She should have managed her game better. I've no patience with people who don't

make sure of their cards. Dear, dear ! who'll read me to sleep of a night ?”

And the others all crowded round me, dirty old Fantyre peering closest of all, with her little, bright, cunning, inquisitive eyes.

“Come, tell us, Chevasney, is it true ?”

“I say, old fellow, what's the row ?”

So the world talks of us, either in our sorrows or our sins ! They were full of curiosity, annoyance, amusement—as it happened to affect them individually ; none of them stopped to regret the great lie, to remember the great wrong, to grieve for the debased human nature, and the bitter satire on the Holy Bond of Marriage, that stood out in such black letters in the new story which I added to their repertoire of scandales. Cancans amuse us ; we never stop to recollect the guilt, the sorrow, or the lie that must give them their foundation-stone, their coloring, and their flavor. Mademoiselle Papillon was nearest of all to the moral of the story, when she shrugged her little plump shoulders :

“Mon Dieu ! Qui voudrait se marier ! Dans celle loterie bizarre qui peut espérer d'éviter la chicane ? En amour on est un ange—en mariage un démon. Nul homme sage ne l'essayerait !”

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The summer sunshine that lit up the sparkling wines, and glittering toilettes, and gorgeous liveries of the fête at Enghein, shining on the Trefusis's parure of amethysts and on the rich scarlet rouge of her cheeks—that flag of defiance that flaunted there in defeat as in victory !—shone at the same hour through the dark luxuriant foliage of the chestnuts at St. Crucis, on the lilac-boughs heavy with massed blossom, on the half-opened rosebuds clinging round the woodwork of the old brown walls, and on the swallow's



nest nestled under the thatch of the eaves. A warm amber light, the light of the coming summer, lay on the earth, and in it the gnats were whirling at their play, and the early butterflies fluttering their saffron wings. The afternoon was perfectly still, no sound breaking in upon its silence except now and then the song of a bird in the branches, the lazy drone of a bee among the lilacs, or the distant chime of a church clock afar off ringing the quarters slowly and softly in the summer air. And out on the dark oaken sill of the window, drooping her head upon her hands, while the light flickered down upon her hair through the network of the leaves, leant a woman, heedless, in the depth of her own thought, of the play of the south wind or the songs of the birds, as both made music about her among the chestnut-blossoms and the lilac-leaves without. Alma had been but a few hours in England, and had come at once to her old home, endeared to her by a thousand associations. She was alone, nothing near her save the bee droning in the cup of the early rose, or the yellow butterfly that settled on her hair unnoticed. Her head was bent, resting on her hand; her face was very pale, save when now and then a deep warm flush passed over it, suddenly to fade again as quickly; her eyes were dark and dreamy, with a yearning tenderness; and on her lips was a smile, mournful yet proud, as, half-unconsciously, they uttered the words of her thoughts aloud: "I will not leave thee, no, nor yet forsake thee. Where thou goest I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God!"

They were the words of an oath—an oath to whose keeping she would dedicate her life, even though, to so keep it, that life would be in the world's eyes condemned and sacrificed. She leant there, against the dark wood-work, alone, the silence unbroken that reigned about her, save when the wind swept through the fragrant branches

above, or the rush of a bird's delicate wings cleft the air. Suddenly—in the stillness, while yet it was so distant that no other ear could have heard it—she caught a footfall while its sound was so faint that it did not break the silence, as the spaniel catches the step of his master while yet afar off; she lifted her head with a wild, eager grace that was natural to her as is its freedom to a flower, her eyes growing dark and humid in their expectancy and their great joy, her color changing swiftly with the force of a joy so keen that it trenched on anguish, with the hot vivid flush of a love strong as the life in which it is imbedded and entwined. Then, with a low, glad cry, she sprang, swift as an antelope, to meet him, and to cling to him as she would have clung to him through evil and adversity, through the scorch of shame and the throes of death, through the taunts of the world and the ghastly terrors of the grave.

For many moments De Vigne could find no words even to tell her that which she never dreamed of, that which panted on his lips; he held her in his arms, crushing her in one long, close embrace, meeting as those meet who would not spend one hour of their lives asunder. For many moments he bent over her, speechless, breathless, straining her madly to him, spending on her lips the passion that found no fitting utterance in words; then, stifled and hoarse in its very agony of joy, his voice broke out:

"You will be my wife—this day—this hour! Alma! thank God with me—I am free!"

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The day stole onward; faintly from the far distance swung the silvery sound of evening bells; the low south winds stirred among the lilac-blossoms, shaking their rich fragrance out upon the air; the bees hummed themselves to slumber in the hearts of folded roses; the mellow amber light grew deeper and clearer, while the first

stars were coming out in the west, the day was passing onward, ere long to fade into twilight, ere long to sink into night. And as the rays of the western sun swept through the parted network of the leaves and fell about his feet, shining in the eyes of the woman he loved, and bathing her hair in light where it swept across his breast, De Vigne bowed his head in thanksgiving too deep for words; not alone for the passionate joy in which his life was steeped, not alone for his freedom from that deadly curse that had been on him for so long—fruits of an early marriage—but for that hour, past yet still so near: so near that still he sickened at it, as men at the memory of some horrible death they have but by a hair's-breadth escaped; that hour when, for the first time in all his wayward, headlong, vehement manhood, he had *resisted* and flung off from him the temptation that, yielded to but for one brief fleeting instant, would, though never tracked or known by man, have made him taste fire in every kiss of the lips he loved, quail before the light of the fairest day that dawned, and start in the sweat of agony, and wake in the terror of remembered guilt from his sweetest rest, his most delicious sleep; that hour in the forest solitude, when, goaded, taunted, reviled, maddened, he had been face to face with what he loathed, parted by her from what he loved, he had had strength enough to fling her from him, untouched, unharmed, unchastised,—that hour which had been the crowning temptation of Granville De Vigne's life. He had had strength to cast it behind him with a firm hand, and had had strength to flee from it—*fearing himself*, as the wisest and holiest among us need do in those dark hours that come to all when there is but a plank between us and the fathomless abyss of some great guilt.

And while the starlit night of the early summer stole onward toward the earth, De Vigne bowed his head over

the woman who had cleaved to him through all, and would so have cleaved howsoever his life had turned, whose arms were close about him, and whose warm lips were on his; and while a deep and delicious joy steeped his present and his future in its own golden and voluptuous delight, he looked backward for one instant to his Past, and thanked God.

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## II.

### ADIEU AU LECTEUR !

THE history is told ! It is one simple enough and common enough in this world, and merely traces out the evil that accrued to two men in the same station of life and in similar circumstances, although of widely different temperaments, from an error of judgment—the most fatal error that man can make—an Early Marriage. Both my friends took advantage of this liberty, you see, to tie themselves again ! I *don't* say in that respect, “Go thou and do likewise,” ami lecteur, if you be similarly situated, but rather, if you are free—keep so ! A wise man, they say, knows when he is well off !

In the *Times* the other day, I read among the deaths, “At Paris, in her ninety-seventh year, Sarah, Viscountess Fentyre.” Gone at last, poor old woman, under the sod, where shrewdness and trickery and rouge and trump cards are of no avail to her, though she held by them to the last. She died as she had lived, I hear, sitting at her whist-table, be-wigged and be-rouged, gathering her dirty, costly lace about her, quoting George Selwyn, dealing herself two honors and six trumps, picking up the guineas with a cunning twinkle of her monkeyish eyes, when Death tapped

her on the brain, and old Fantyre was carried off the scene in an apoplectic fit; while her partner, the Comte de Beaujeu, murmured over his tabatière, "Peste! Death is horribly ill bred; he should have let us played the conqueror!"

What memoirs the old woman might have left us—dirty ones, sans doute, but what memoirs of intrigues, plots, scandals, schemes—what rich glimpses behind the cards—what amusing peeps beneath the purple! A great many people, though, are glad, I dare say, that the Fantyre experiences are not down in black and white, and no publisher, perhaps, would have been courageous enough to risk their issue. They would have blackened plenty of fair reputations had their gunpowder burst; they would have offended a world which loves to prate of its morals, cackle of its purity, and double-lock its chamber-doors; they would have given us keys to many skeleton cupboards, which we should have opened to turn away from more heart-sick than before!

Her protégée, the Trefusis, has in nowise gone off the scene, nor did she consent to drop down into a valet's wife. Her exposée at Morehampton's villa had been the most bitter thing life could have brought her, for she had read enough of Rochefoucauld to think with him, "*le ridicule déshonore plus que le déshonneur.*" She sought the friendly shadow of Notre-Dame de Lorette. Fearing her husband no longer, she bribed him no more; and if you like to see her any day, walk down the Rue Bréda, or look out in the Pre Catalan for a carriage with lapis-lazuli liveries, dashing as the Montespan's, and you will have painted to you in a moment the full-blown magnificence (now certainly coarse, and I dare say only got up at infinite trouble from Blanc de Perle and Bulli's best rouge) of the quasi-milliner of Frestonhills. She has at present, en proie, a Russian prince, and thrives, à ravir, upon

roubles. Her imperial sables are the envy of the Quarrier; and as women who range under the Piratical Flag don't trouble their heads with a Future, the Trefsis does not stop to think that she may end in le Maison Dieu, with a bowl of soupe maigre, when her beauty shall utterly have lost all that superb and sensual bloom that lured De Vigne in his hot youth to such deadly cost.

"A young man married is a man that's marred."

The stag with the grip of the stag-bound ever at his throat; the antelope with the fangs of the tigress ever tearing his reeking flanks; the racer yoked in the heavy galling shafts that he must drag behind him over stony roads till he faints and dies, still with his burden harnessed on him; these unions were not worse than many of those marriages that are the bitter fruit of no sin, no fault, no error, but merely of a *mistake*!—those marriages that are a bondage more cruel, more eternal, more unpitied than the captivity of Israel in Egypt!

"A young man married is a man that's marred." One wrote that who was more deeply skilled in the intricacies of the human heart, who saw more profoundly into the manifold varieties, the wayward and conflicting instincts of human life, than any by whom the world has since let itself be led and moulded. "Marred?" How can the man fail to be so who chooses his yoke-fellow for life in all the blind haste, the crude taste of his earlier years, when taste in all things alters so utterly from youth to manhood? In what the youth of five-and-twenty thinks so wise, fair, excellent, half a score or a score years later on he sees but little beauty. In study, sport, literature, his preference changes much in the interval that parts his early from his matured years; I have heard young fellows in their college terms utterly recant in June all they swore by religiously in January, equally earnest and sincere, more-

over, in their recantation and their adoration! Taste, bias, opinion, judgment, all alter as their judgment widens, their taste ripens, and their sight grows keener from longer mixing amid the world, and longer studying its varied views. God help, then, the man who has taken to his heart and into his life a wife who, fair in his eyes in all the glamour of love, all the "purpureal light of youth," is as insufficient to him in his maturer years as are the weaker thoughts, the cruder studies, the unformed judgment, the boyish revelries of his youth. The thoughts might be well in their way, the studies beneficial, the judgment generous and just, the revels harmless, but he has *outgrown them*—gone beyond them—left them far behind him; and he can no more return to them and find them sufficient for him than he can return to the *Gradus ad Parnassum* of his first school-days. So the wife, too, may be good in her way; he may strive to be faithful to her and to cleave to her as he has sworn to do; he may seek with all his might to come to her side, to bring back the old feeling, to join the broken chain, to find her all he needs and all he used to think her; he may strive with all his might to do this, but it is *Sisyphus-labor*; she does not satisfy his manhood, the scales have fallen from his eyes, he loves her no longer! It is not his fault; she belongs to the things of his youth that pleased a crude taste, an immature judgment; he sees her now *as she is*, and she is far below him, far behind him; if he progress he must go on alone, if he fall back to her level his mind deteriorates with every day that dawns! Would he bring to the Commons no arguments riper than the crude debates that were his glory at the Union? would he condemn himself in science never to discard the unsound theories that were the delight of his early speculations? would he deny himself the right to fling aside the moonshine philosophies, the cobweb metaphysics that he wove in his youth,

and forbid himself title to advance beyond them? Surely not! Yet he would chain himself through his lifelong to a yoke-fellow as unfit and insufficient to his older years as ever the theories and thoughts of his youth can be; as fatal to his peace while he is bound to her, as they, could he be bound to them, would be fatal to the mind they dwarfed, to the brain they crammed into a prison-cell!

In youth Rosaline seems very fair,  
None else being by,  
Herself poised with herself in either eye.

A young man meets a young girl in society, or at the sea-side, or on the deck of a Rhine steamer; she has nice fresh coloring, bright-blue eyes, or black ones, as the case may be, very nice ankles, and a charming voice. She is a pretty girl to everybody; to him, thrown across her by chance, she is beautiful—divine! He thinks, over his pipe, that she is just his ideal of Enone, or Gretchen, or airy fairy Lilian, if he be of a poetic turn, and rank with German idealism; or meditates that she's "a clipper of a girl, and, by Jupiter! what lovely scarlet lips, and what a pretty foot!" if of a material disposition. He falls in love with her, as the phrase goes; he flirts with her at water-parties, and pays her a few morning calls; he sees her trifling with a bit of fancy-work, and hears her pretty voice say a few things about the weather. A few oeil-lades, a few waltzes, a few têtes-à-têtes; when looking at the rosebud lips he never criticises what they utter, and he proposes—he is accepted; they are both dreadfully in love, of course, and—marry. It is a pretty dream for a few months; an easy yoke, perhaps, for a few years; then gradually the illusions drop one by one, as the leaves drop from a shaken rose, loth, yet forced to fall. He finds her mind narrowed, bigoted, ill-stored, with no single thought



in it akin to his own. What could he learn of it in those few morning calls, those few ball-room *têtes-à-têtes*, when the glamour was on him, and he would have cared nothing though she could not have spelled his name? Or—he finds her a bad temper, (when does temper ever show in society, and how could he see her without society's controlling eye upon her?) snarling at her servants, her dogs, the soup, the east winds; meeting him with petulant acerbity, revenging on him her milliner's neglect, her maid's stupidity, her migraine, or her torn Mechlin. Or—he finds her a heartless coquette, cheapening his honor, holding his name as carelessly as a child holds a mirror, forgetting, like the child, that a breath on it is a stain; turning a deaf ear to his remonstrance; flinging at him, with a sneer, some died-out folly—"before *I* knew you, sir!"—that she has ferreted out; goading him to words that he knows, for his own dignity, were best unsaid, then turning to hysteria and se posent en martyre. Or—and this, I take it, is the worst case for both—the wife is a good wife, as many (ladies say most) wives are; he knows it, he feels it, he honors her for it, but—she is a bitter disappointment to him. He comes home worn out with the day's labor, but successful from it; he sits down to a *tête-à-tête* dinner; he tells her of the hard-won election, the hot-worded debate in the House, the issue of a great law-case that he has brought off victorious, of his conquest over death by the bedside of a sinking patient, of the compliment to his corps from the commander-in-chief, of the one thing that is the essence of his life and the end of his ambition; she listens with a vague, amiable, absent smile, but her heart is not with him, nor her ear. "Yes, dear—indeed—how very nice! But cook has ruined that splendid haunch. Do look! it is really burnt to a cinder!" She never gives him any more than that! She cannot help it; she is a good,

patient, domestic, quiet woman, who would not do wrong for the world, but her sphere is the nursery, her thoughts center on the misdemeanors of her household, her mission is emphatically to "suckle fools and chronicle small-beer." The perpetual drop, drop, of her small worries, her puerile pleasures, is like the ceaseless dropping of water on his brain; try how he might, he could never waken this woman's mind to one pulse in unison with his in the closest relationship of human life; she is less capable of understanding him in his defeats, his victories, his struggles, than the senseless writing-paper, which, though it cannot respond to them, at least lets him score his thoughts on its blank pages, and will bear them unobliterated! Yet this disunion in union is common enough in this world: when a man marries early it is too generally certain.

A man early married, moreover, is *prematurely aged*. While he is yet young his wife is old; while he is in the fullest vigor of his manhood, she is gray, and faded, and ageing; youth has long gone from her, while in him it is still fresh; and while away from her he is young, by her side he feels old. Married—in youth he takes upon himself burdens that should never weigh save upon middle age; in middle age he plays the part that should be reserved for age alone. I read the other day, in an essay, a remark of the writer's relative to the marriage of Milverton, in the last series of *Friends in Council*, with a girl of twenty-two, in which he said that he could well conceive what a delight it might be to a man at or past middle age, who had believed his youth lost forever, to have it restored to him in a love which gives him the rich and subtle gladness that brings back the "greenness to the grass and the glory to the flower." It is true; and it is this later love which can satisfy him and not fade and disappoint him; since it is in later years alone that his own character will

have become no longer mutable, his own tastes have ripened, and his own judgment grown secure. Yet to the man who has married early, this resurrection of his youth can never come, or, if it come, can only come in bitterness, like the bitterness of the prisoner who catches one glimpse of the fair laughing earth lying beyond in the sunlight, and knows that the bars of his cell are fixed, and that on his limbs are the weight of irons.

And, to take it in a more practical sense, scarcely the less inevitably from every point is "a young man married a man that's marred." If to men of fortune, like Sabretasche and De Vigne, with every opiate of pleasure and excitement to drown the gall and fret of uncongenial or unhappy union, early marriage blots and mars life as it does, how much more bitter still to those who are poor and struggling men, with the burden of work, hardly done and scantily paid, upon their shoulders, is its fatal error! A young man starts in life with no capital, but a good education and a profession, that, like all professions, cannot be lucrative to him till time has mellowed his reputation, and experience made him, more or less, a name in it. It brings him quite enough for his *garçon* wants; he lives comfortably enough in his chambers or his lodgings, with no weightier daily outlay than his Cavendish and his chop; study comes easy to him, with a brain that has no care gnawing on it; society is cheap, for his chums come contentedly for a pipe, and some punch or some beer, and think none the worse of him because he does not give them turtle and Vin Mosseux. He can live for little if he like; if he want change and travel, he can take his knapsack and a walking tour; nobody is dependent on him; if he be straitened by poverty, the strain is on him alone; he is not tortured by the cry of those who look to him for daily bread; the world is before him, to choose at least where he

will work in it; in a word, he is free! But, if he marries, his up-hill career is fettered by a clog that draws him backward every step he sets; his profession is inadequate to meet the expenses that crowd in on him; if he keep manfully and honestly out of debt, economy and privation eat his very life away, as, say what romancists may, they ever must; if he live beyond his income, as too many professional men are almost driven to do in our day, there is a pressure upon him like the weights they laid upon offenders in the old Newgate press-yards. He toils, he struggles, he works, as brain-workers must, feverishly and at express speed to keep in the van at all; he is old, while by right of years he should yet be young, in the constant harassing rack and strain to "keep up appearances," and *seem* well off while every shilling is of consequence; he writes for his bread with the bray of brawling children above his head; he goes to his office turning over and over in wretched arithmetic the sums he owes to the baker and the butcher; he smiles courteously upon his patients or his clients with the iron in his soul and county-court summonses hanging over his head. He goes back from his rounds or his office, or comes out of his study after a long day, jaded, fagged, worn out; comes, not to quiet, to peace, to solitude, with a Havana and a book, to anything that would soothe the fagged nerves and ease the strain for an hour at least, but only for some miserable petty worry, some fresh small care; to hear his wife going into mortal agonies because her youngest son has the measles, or bear the leer of the servants when they say "the tax-gatherer's called again, and, please, must he go away?"

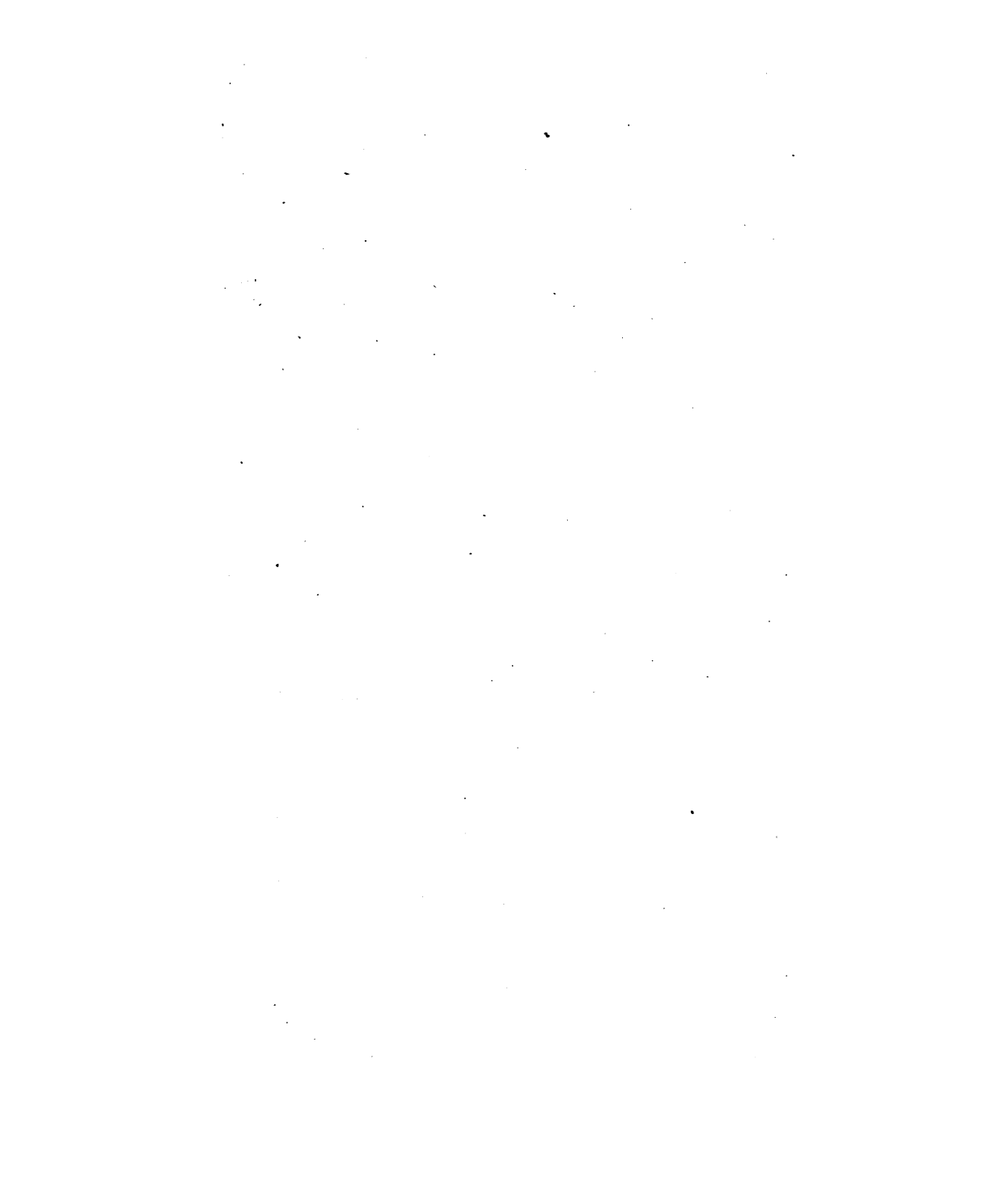
Corregio *literally* dying in the heat and burden of the day, of the weary weight, the torturing rack of home-cares, his family and his poverty dragging him downward and

clogging his genius as the drenching rains upon its wings clog the flight of a bird, is but sample of the death-in-life, the age-in-youth, the self-begotten curse, the self-elected doom, that almost inevitably dog the steps of a man who has married early, be his station what it may, be his choice what it will.

This Spring of Love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day,  
Which shows now all the beauty of the sun,  
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away!

Such is love, rarely anything better, scarcely ever anything more durable. Such are all *early* loves, invariably, inevitably. God help, then, though we may count them by the myriad, those who in and for that one brief "April day," which, warm and shadowless at morning, sees the frost down long before night, pay rashly as Esau paid in the moment of eager delight, when no price was counted and no value asked; pay, with headstrong thoughtlessness, in madman's haste, the one priceless birthright upon earth—Freedom!

"A young man married is a man that's marred!"





1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.



**This book is under no circumstances to be  
taken from the Building**

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